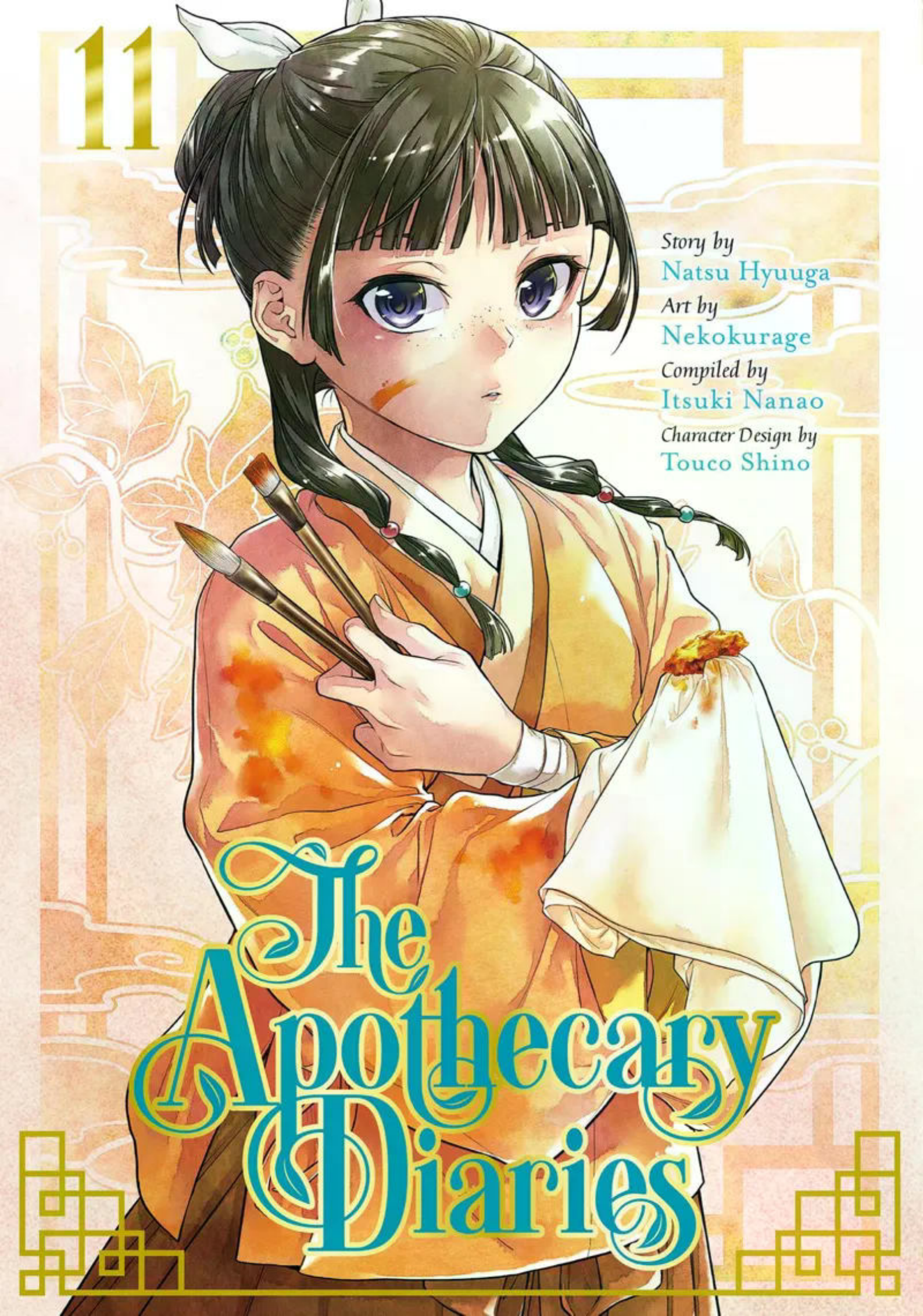
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The Apothecary Diaries

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The Apothecary Diaries

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Chapter 54 The Shrine of Choosing ②


THE ONLY WOMEN TO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ALONG ON THIS JOURNEY THROUGH THE SHRINE BEFORE...
...WERE PRINCESSES AND CONSORTS.
I GAVE YOU LEAVE TO JOIN US LAST TIME AS ONE OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S CHOSEN ATTENDANTS...
...BUT ALLOWING SOMEONE WITH NO RELATION TO THE IMPERIAL LINE TO HAVE A SAY ON THE SELECTION OF THE DOORS IS ANOTHER MATTER ENTIRELY.
OR DO YOU BELIEVE YOURSELF SOMEHOW QUALIFIED, YOUNG LADY?


THEN I SHALL JUST HAVE TO TAKE HER AS A CONSORT!
!
CONVINCING LAKAN WILL BE NO MEAN FEAT, I FEAR...
...BUT YOU WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTIONS THEN, CORRECT?
PLEASE REFRAIN FROM SUCH JESTS, YOUR MAJESTY!

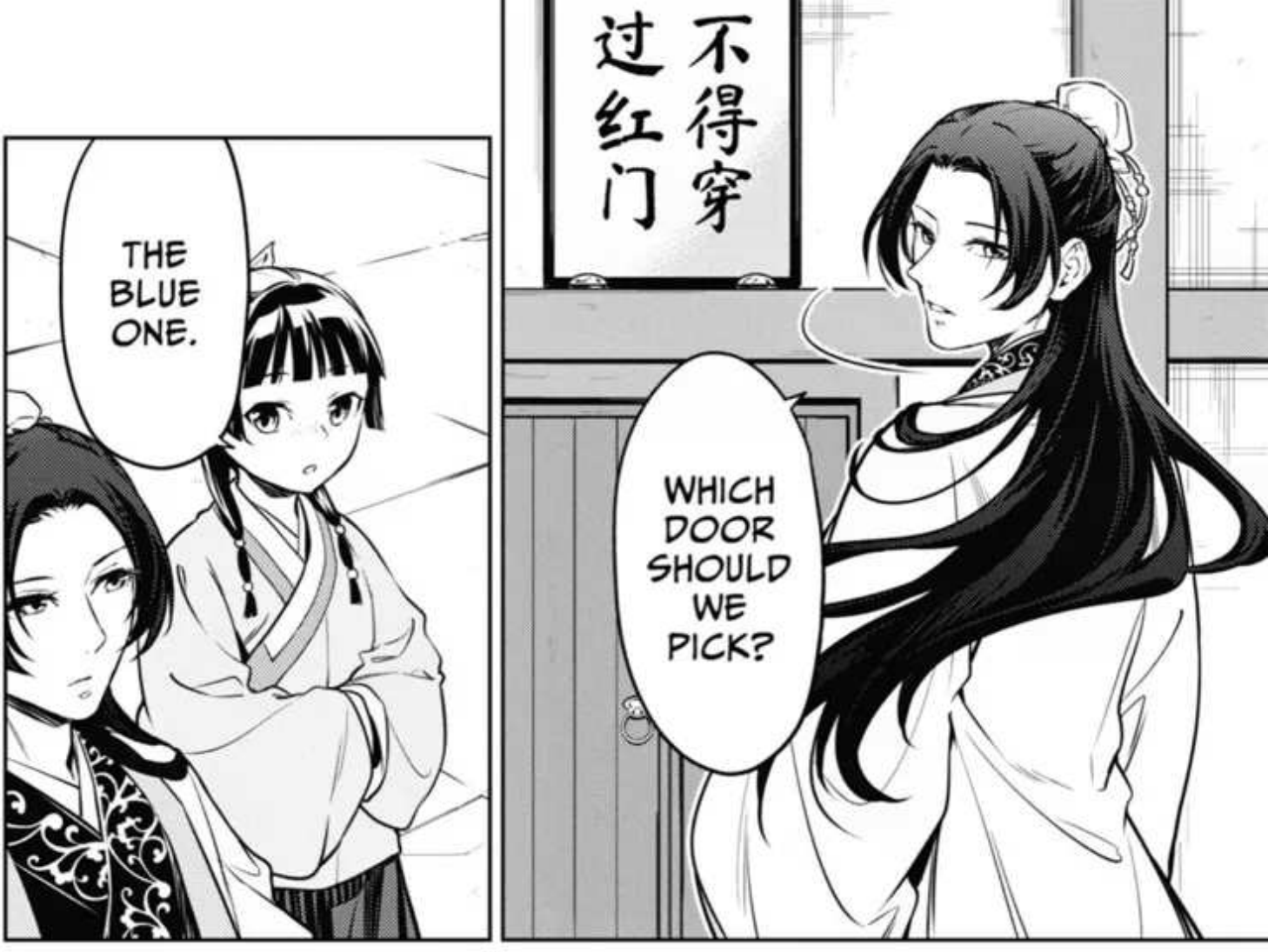

JUST THINK OF THE LOOKS YOU'D GET FROM YOUR OTHER CONSORTS!


THIS RELAXED SIDE IS SOMEWHAT DIFFER-ENT...
...FROM THE ONE WE SEE AT THE JADE PALACE.


HA!
HA!
HA!
TRUE ENOUGH!
NOTHING LESS THAN A BUST OF 90 CENTI-METERS...
...WILL AROUSE THE EMPEROR'S PASSIONS.


IN THAT CASE...
...YOU TAKE THE GIRL THROUGH IN MY STEAD.
ARE YOU SURE?
SHE APPEARS TO HAVE A THEORY SHE'S KEEN TO TEST...
...AND I MYSELF AM VERY KEEN TO KNOW WHAT THAT IS.
SIGH...
.....AS YOU WISH, SIRE.


WHAT AN ODDLY MERCURIAL FELLOW, OUR EMPEROR.
ORDINARILY, IT WOULD BE HIGHLY IMPROPER FOR JINSHI...
...TO WALK IN FRONT OF THE EMPEROR WHEN HE ISN'T EVEN SERVING AS A GUIDE...
...TO SAY NOTHING OF CHOOSING DOORS IN THIS IMPERIAL RITE OF PASSAGE.
CREEEEAK
不得穿过红门


不得穿过红门
WHICH DOOR SHOULD WE PICK?
THE BLUE ONE.


CREAK


不得穿过黑门
NOW WHICH?
THE WHITE DOOR.


THE CHOICES ALREADY DIFFER FROM MINE.
HMM.




THIS IS THE TENTH ROOM.
WE DIDN'T GET THIS FAR LAST TIME.


汝得选
择红门
"THOU SHALT CHOOSE THE RED DOOR."


A WHITE, A BLACK, AND A GREEN DOOR.
WHICH MEANS ...
BUT THERE'S NO RED DOOR HERE.
WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?


YOUR ANSWER LIES BEYOND THE GREEN DOOR.
VERY WELL.
CREAK


WE...
WE'RE ...!


CONGRAT-
ULATIONS.
YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE CORRECT PATH.
IN OLDEN TIMES, IT WAS THE DUTY OF HE WHO HAD EARNED THE QUEEN MOTHER'S BLESSING TO TAKE UP THE CROWN...
...AND ADDRESS THE PEOPLE FROM ATOP THE ROOF OF THIS SHRINE...
...WHICH WAS THEN THE HIGHEST POINT IN THE CITY.
WHEN NONE COULD WORK OUT THE TRUE PATH...
...A PRO-SPECTIVE RULER WAS PERMITTED TO TRY AGAIN...
...WITH A CONSORT WHO COULD PICK HER WAY CORRECTLY THROUGH THE SHRINE AT HIS SIDE.


NATURALLY, THIS IS TO BE ACCOM-PLISHED...
...BY SOMEONE OF THE QUEEN MOTHER'S BLOOD-LINE.
BUT AS WE CAN SEE, IT WAS SOMEONE ELSE ENTIRELY WHO COMPLETED THE RITE THIS TIME.
YOU GOADED ME IN THE FIRST PLACE.
LAY OFF, OLD MAN.


NEVER MIND THAT. I DEMAND AN EXPLA-NATION.
PERHAPS YOU SHOULD ASK HER INSTEAD.


LEAVING ALL THE HARD STUFF TO ME, EH?


YOU HEARD THE MAN!

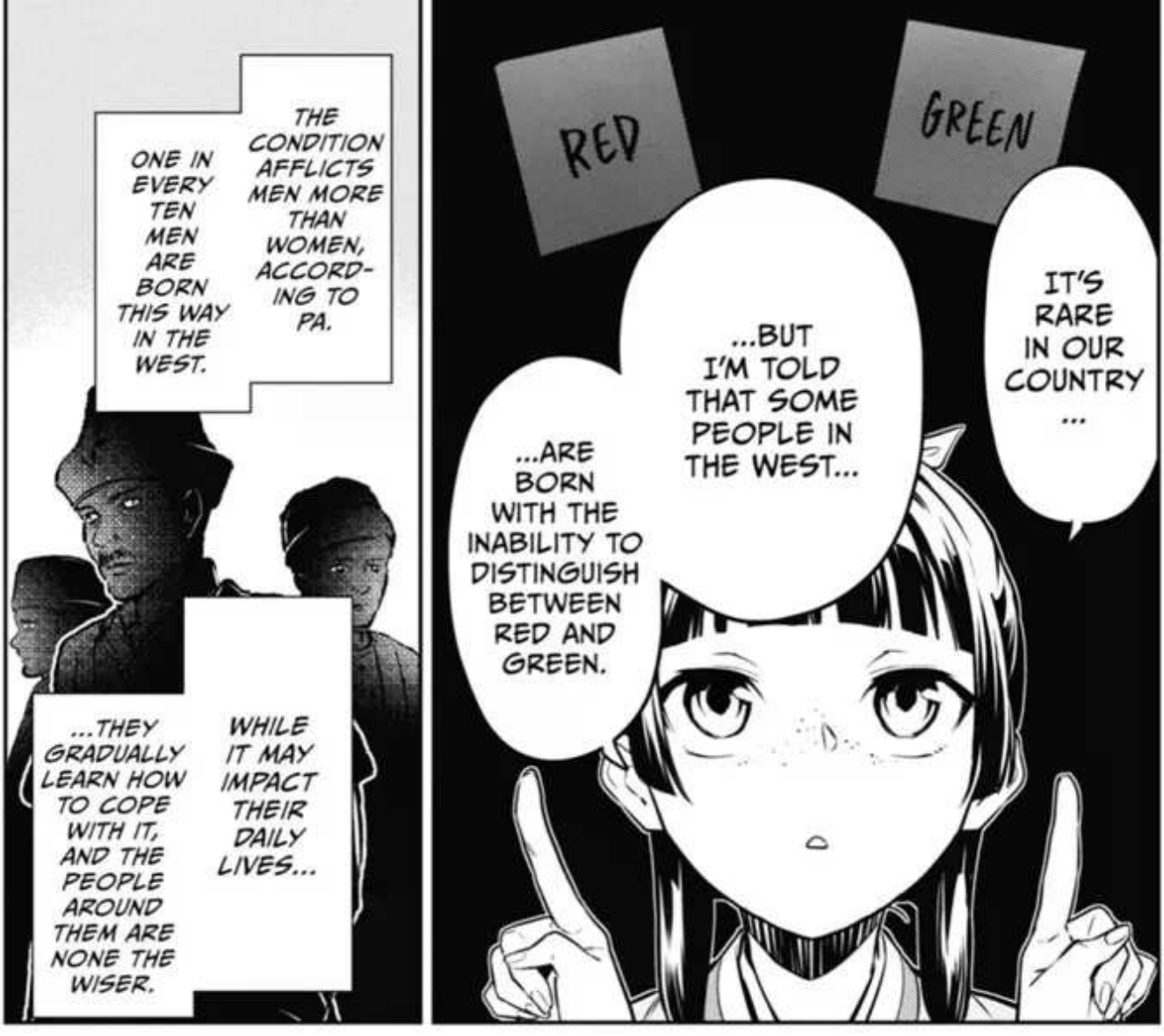

不得穿过红门
GREEN
RED
BLUE
VERY WELL. I SHALL EXPLAIN MY CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE DOORS.
IN THE FIRST ROOM...
...THERE WAS A BLUE, A RED, AND A GREEN DOOR, ALONG WITH A SIGN THAT READ, "DO NOT PASS THROUGH THE RED DOOR."
THUS, I CHOSE THE BLUE ONE.
THE GREEN DOOR SHOULD'VE ALSO BEEN A VALID OPTION, GOING BY THE SIGN.


HOWEVER, THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE...
...WHO CANNOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE COLORS RED AND GREEN.
THERE ARE?
YES.


AND BECAUSE THEY CANNOT...
...THEY'D PICK THE DOOR THEY KNEW FOR A FACT WAS NOT RED.


THE SAME GOES FOR THE NEXT ROOM.
IF SOMEONE WAS UNABLE TO TELL THE BLACK AND RED DOORS APART, THEY WOULD PICK THE WHITE ONE.
AT FIRST GLANCE, EACH RIDDLE APPEARS TO HAVE TWO CORRECT ANSWERS...
...BUT IN TRUTH, THERE IS ONLY ONE.
SO BECAUSE THEY COULD CORRECTLY IDENTIFY THE WHITE AND THE BLACK DOORS...
...THEY'D HAVE PICKED THE GREEN DOOR IN THE LAST ROOM?
EXACTLY.


I BELIEVE THE FINAL DOOR WAS MADE GREEN...
...BASED ON THE KNOWL-EDGE THAT THOSE WHO HAD REACHED THE LAST ROOM...
...WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RED AND GREEN.
...SO WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?
THE PROOF THAT ONE IS BOTH A CHILD OF THE QUEEN MOTHER AND THE SHRINE'S CHOSEN...
...IS THAT THEY ARE COLOR-BLIND.


RED
GREEN
IT'S RARE IN OUR COUNTRY ...
...BUT I'M TOLD THAT SOME PEOPLE IN THE WEST...
...ARE BORN WITH THE INABILITY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN RED AND GREEN.
THE CONDITION AFFLICTS MEN MORE THAN WOMEN, ACCORDING TO PA.
ONE IN EVERY TEN MEN ARE BORN THIS WAY IN THE WEST.
WHILE IT MAY IMPACT THEIR DAILY LIVES...
...THEY GRADUALLY LEARN HOW TO COPE WITH IT, AND THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM ARE NONE THE WISER.


ACCORDING TO THE FOUNDING LEGEND...
...THE QUEEN MOTHER WAS ABLE TO SEE FAR AND WIDE IN THE DARK, RIGHT?


I HAVEN'T INVESTIGATED THIS MYSELF ...
...BUT I HAVE HEARD THOSE WHO HAVE TROUBLE MAKING OUT COLORS ...
...CAN SEE BETTER IN THE DARK BECAUSE OF IT.


WHEN TRAITS THAT ADVERSELY IMPACT DAILY LIFE ARE PASSED FROM PARENTS TO CHILDREN...
...THE CHILDREN ALSO OFTEN INHERIT THEIR PARENTS' EXCEP-TIONAL QUALITIES.
I THINK PERHAPS THAT IS THE REASON THIS SHRINE WAS BUILT TO CHOOSE THE NEXT RULER.
IF NONE IN LINE FOR THE THRONE COULD COMPLETE THIS RITE OF PASSAGE ...
...THEN HE WHO WISHED TO RULE WOULD NEED TO TAKE A CONSORT OF WESTERN BLOOD LIKE THAT OF THE QUEEN MOTHER.
THAT MUST BE WHY CONSORTS ARE GIVEN LEAVE TO ENTER.


THE LEGEND SAYS THE QUEEN MOTHER CAME FROM A FARAWAY LAND.
IT MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE DIFFICULT FOR HER AND HER PEOPLE TO MIGRATE TO A NEW PLACE...
...WHILE BEING COLOR-BLIND.


IN THE STORY, THE QUEEN MOTHER HAD NO HUSBAND...
...BUT SHE LIKELY MARRIED THE CHIEF OF THIS LAND.


IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL FOR A LOCAL LEADER TO TAKE A FOREIGNER AS HIS WIFE...
...TO HELP DILUTE A BLOODLINE THAT HAD BECOME CONCENTRATED THROUGH GENERATIONS OF INTERMARRIAGE.
THAT WOULD EXPLAIN WHY THIS COUNTRY PRIORITIZES THE MALE LINE OF SUCCESSION.
HOWEVER, THE QUEEN MOTHER AND HER RETAINERS WERE AGAINST THIS.
THUS, THEY DEVISED A MEANS TO ENSURE THAT HER BLOODLINE...
...WOULD CONTINUE TO FLOW THROUGH THE LEADERS OF THE NATION—
THIS SHRINE.


EVENTUALLY, THOSE WHO HAD BEEN PRESENT AT THE TIME TURNED TO DUST...
...AND ALL THAT REMAINED WAS THE TALE OF THE QUEEN MOTHER, NOW REGARDED AS FACT.
BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THEIR FOREIGN ARTS...
...HER PEOPLE BECAME THE HEART OF THE POPULATION, BEQUEATHING THEIR SKILLS THROUGH THE GENERATIONS.
WHAT A PEACEFUL AND PATIENT WAY TO USURP A THRONE.
IN THE PROCESS, THEY CRAFTED THE LEGEND OF THE QUEEN MOTHER...
...AND PASSED IT DOWN ORALLY, WHERE THE TRUTH GENTLY GREW BENT.


...I WOULD NEVER GO SO FAR AS TO ACTUALLY SAY ALL THAT OUT LOUD.
BUT...
SO YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT THE QUEEN MOTHER'S BLOOD DOES NOT FLOW THROUGH MY VEINS?
MY MOTHER WAS NOT RELATED TO THE EMPEROR.
NOR MY GRAND-MOTHER, THE EM-PRESS.
SHAKE
SHAKE
THE SHRINE MERELY CHECKS WHETHER ONE IS COLOR-BLIND.
WHILE A PARENT MAY HAVE THAT TRAIT, THERE ARE CASES...
...IN WHICH IT IS NOT PASSED ALONG TO THE CHILD.


IT WOULD BE A DIFFERENT STORY IF THE EMPEROR'S MOTHER HAD BEEN UNFAITHFUL ...
...BUT THERE'S NO WAY OF REALLY KNOWING.
MOREOVER, WHEN A BLOODLINE GROWS TOO CONCENTRATED, IT HAS THE ADVERSE EFFECT OF WEAKENING THE BODY.
IN ADDITION TO THE LATE EMPEROR'S SIBLINGS DYING IN AN EPIDEMIC...
...MANY OF HIS OTHER RELATIONS WERE ALSO FELLED BY DISEASE.
PERHAPS THIS WAS THE COST...
...OF SELECTIVELY PRIORITIZING THE BLOODLINE TO BE CHOSEN BY THE SHRINE.
I'M IMPRESSED A GIRL AS YOUNG AS YOURSELF WAS ABLE TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY.
CLAP ぱち
CLAP ぱち
CLAP ぱち


IT IS SAID THAT THE QUEEN MOTHER CAME TO RULE THIS LAND...
...BECAUSE SHE WAS EXTRAORDINARILY INTELLIGENT.
I CAN'T IMAGINE ...
...SHE'D HAVE THOUGHT TO BUILD THIS SHRINE TO ENSURE HER BLOODLINE IF SHE HADN'T BEEN.
PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER ADDING THIS LASS TO YOUR HAREM, AFTER ALL.
HUNH?


HA!
HA!
HA!
THIS OLD COOT ...
... BETTER WATCH HIS MOUTH.


THERE ARE MANY WHO WOULD NOT LOOK KINDLY UPON THAT.
NOW THERE'S A THOUGHT!
I'D PREFER NOT TO COUNT LAKAN AMONG MY ENEMIES, THOUGH.
HOW RUDE...
BESIDES WHICH, SHE NEEDS TO FILL OUT ANOTHER 15 CENTIMETERS OR SO IN THE CHEST TO BE MORE TO MY LIKING!
?
STARE


PLEASE DO TAKE THE UTMOST CARE.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME.
I AM AWARE, YOUR MAJESTY.
...IT IS YOU WHO MUST TAKE CARE.
...!!









HOWEVER, I HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING AT THE TIME...

...THAT I WOULD COME TO DEEPLY REGRET THIS A FEW DAYS LATER.


Chapter 55
ポン
BOMP
ポン
BOMP
ポン
BOMP
ポン
BOMP


FLINCH
TOTTER フラ
TOTTER フラ..
GRIP


FREEZE
OH!
MOTHER!
TMP
TMP


シャラン
JANGLE
シャラン
JANGLE
JANGLE
シャラン
ザシュ!!!
ZSH


ジャ
JANGLE
ンラ


SHE MUST BE VERY IMPORTANT.
BOW






COME, NOW.
LET'S RETURN TO YOUR ROOM.
FWIP
TRMBL
TRMBL
TRMBL
CHATTR
CHATTR

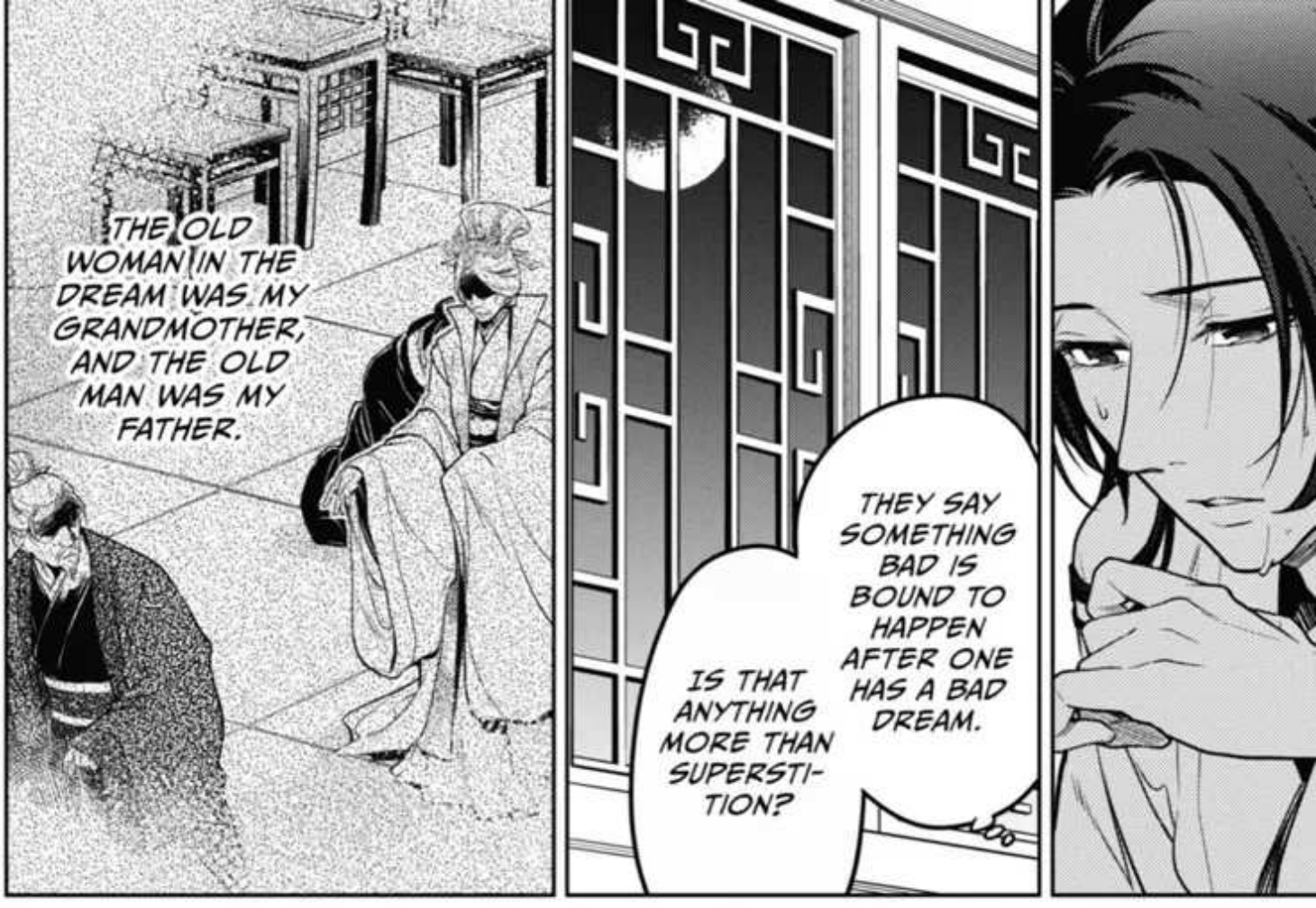

RAISE


I WONDER WHO THAT OLD MAN AND OLD WOMAN ARE.

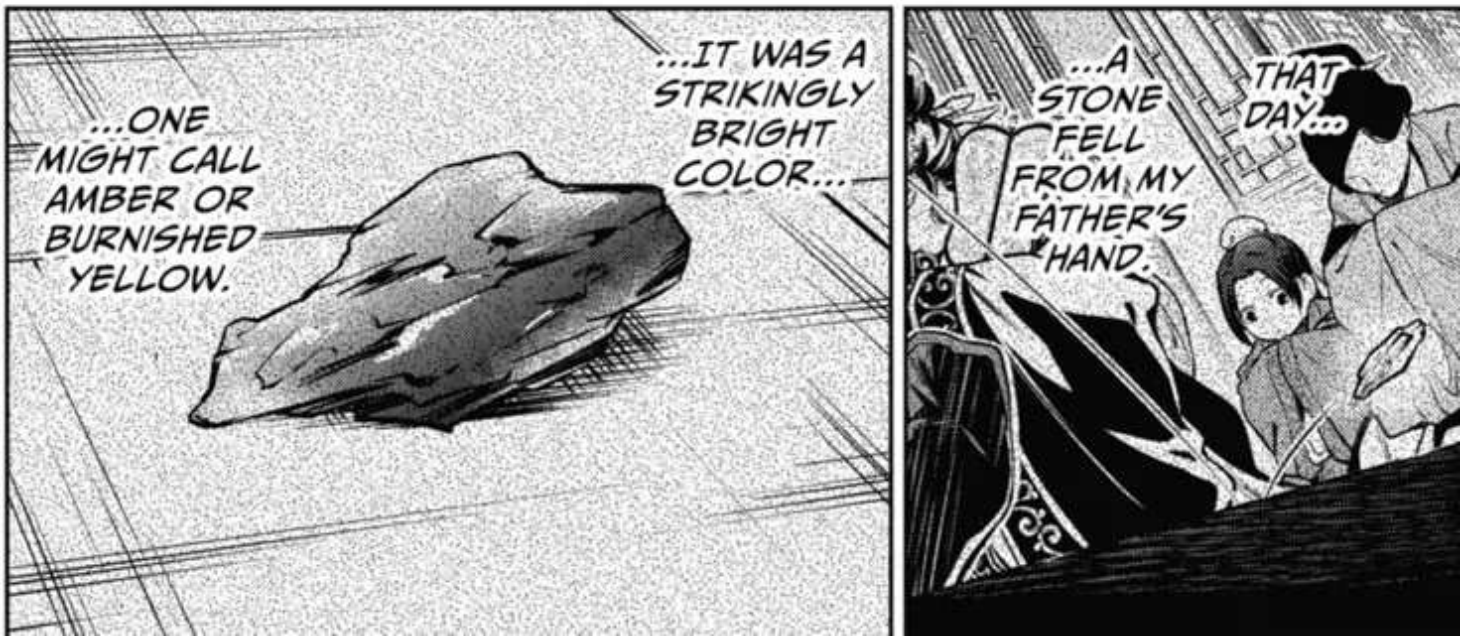

WHY...


...IS MOTHER MAKING THAT FACE?


I CAN'T REALLY REMEM-BER.
GULP
PWAH!
I FEEL SICK.

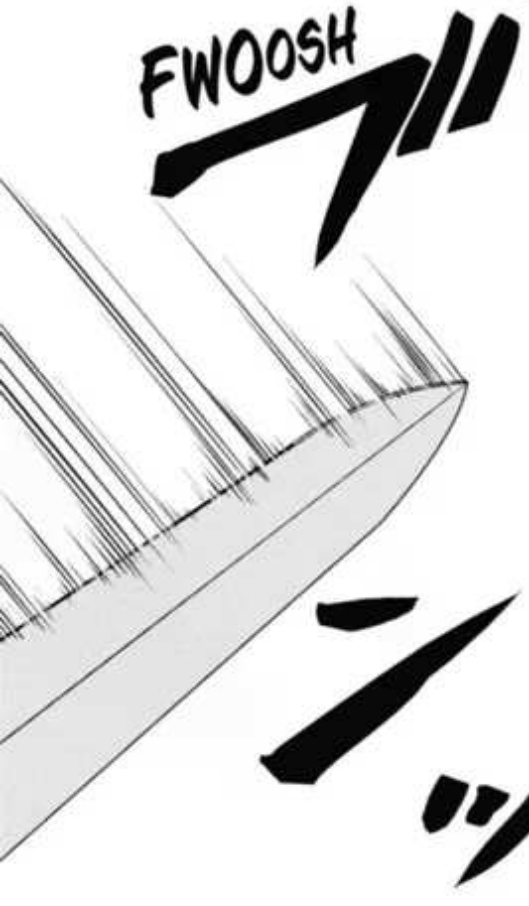

THE OLD WOMAN IN THE DREAM WAS MY GRANDMOTHER, AND THE OLD MAN WAS MY FATHER.
IS THAT ANYTHING MORE THAN SUPERSTI-TION?
THEY SAY SOMETHING BAD IS BOUND TO HAPPEN AFTER ONE HAS A BAD DREAM.


...IS ACTUALLY MY OLDER BROTHER.
AND THE MAN I THOUGHT WAS MY FATHER...


...ONE MIGHT CALL AMBER OR BURNISHED YELLOW.
...IT WAS A STRIKINGLY BRIGHT COLOR...
...A STONE FELL FROM MY FATHER'S HAND.
THAT DAY...


I WONDER WHAT THAT STONE WAS.


DAWN WON'T BE BREAKING ANYTIME SOON.


FWOOSH
ヒュッ


...I GUESS I'LL GET SOME SWINGS IN.


I'LL HAVE TO ASK SUIREN TO PREPARE A HOT BATH FOR ME LATER.
I CAN'T KEEP MY SECRET FOREVER.


EVEN THAT GIRL WHO'S IGNORANT ABOUT THE ODDEST THINGS...
...WILL PROBABLY FIGURE IT OUT SOON.
OR MAYBE SHE ALREADY KNOWS...


THAT'D CERTAINLY MAKE THINGS EASIER FOR ME.


SUIREN SHOULD BE COMING TO WAKE ME IN A BIT.
I'LL JUST GET A LITTLE MORE SLEEP ...
...TILL SHE DOES.

Chapter 55 The Empress Dowager



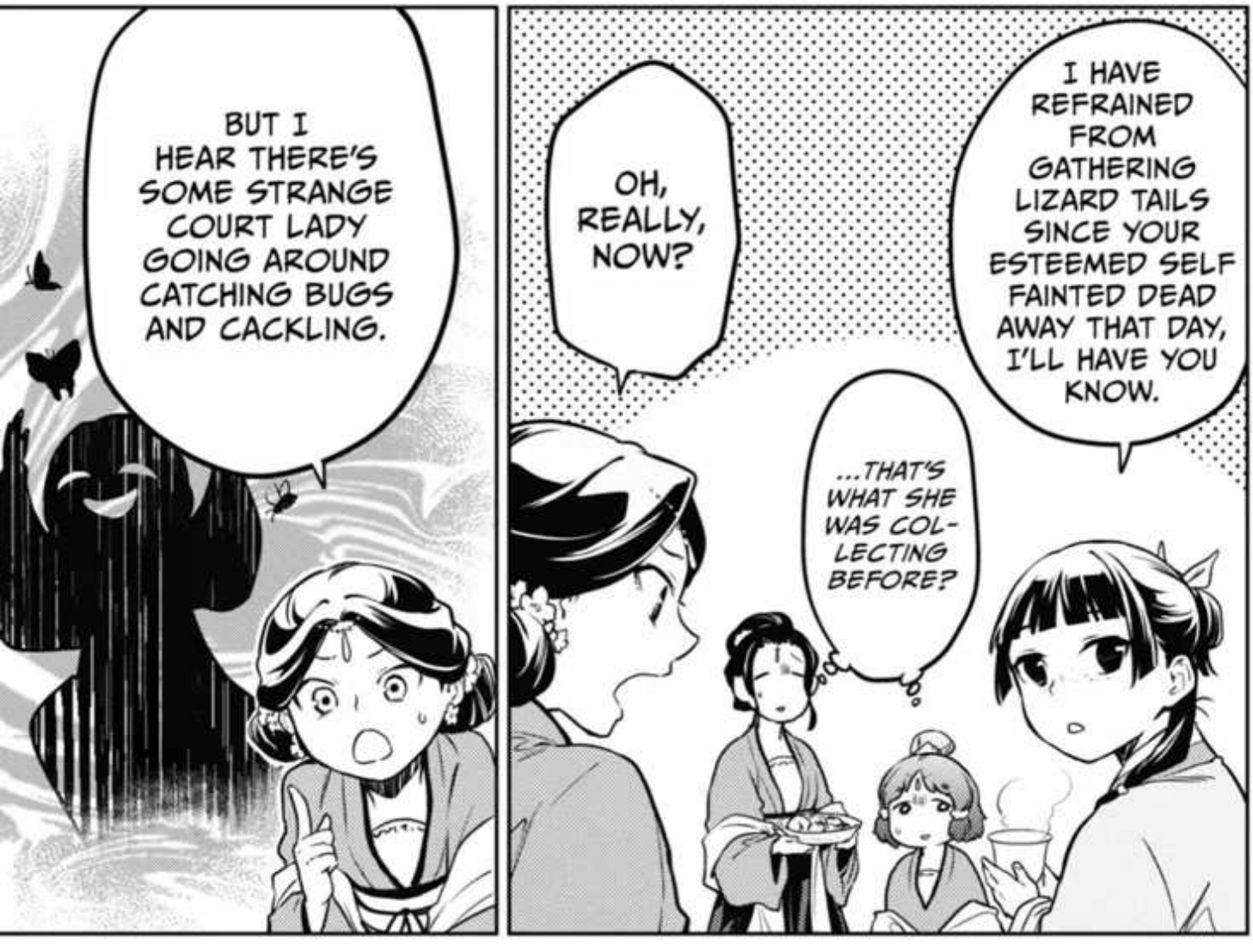

THESE WILL BE YOUR QUARTERS, STARTING TODAY.
YOU REALLY MEAN IT? I CAN STAY HERE?
YES. I HOPE YOU'LL LEARN YOUR LESSON.


THANK YOU SO MUCH!


I TOLD YOU IT'D BE POINT-LESS!




NOW, NOW, YINGHUA. THAT'S A VERY UNKIND THING TO SAY.
BUT THIS GIRL!
SHE'S STILL HUNTING FOR BUGS DESPITE THAT FIERCE SCOLDING SHE GOT!


I HAVE REFRAINED FROM GATHERING LIZARD TAILS SINCE YOUR ESTEEMED SELF FAINTED DEAD AWAY THAT DAY, I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW.
OH, REALLY, NOW?
...THAT'S WHAT SHE WAS COL-LECTING BEFORE?
BUT I HEAR THERE'S SOME STRANGE COURT LADY GOING AROUND CATCHING BUGS AND CACKLING.


I HAVE DONE NO SUCH THING.
SURE, I HAD TO CATCH A WHOLE BUNCH OF MOTHS FOR THAT JOB...
...BUT I'D NEVER CACKLE WHILE CATCHING THEM.




YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW SHISUI'S BEEN?


HEY, GIRLS!
DO ANY OF YOU KNOW WHERE SHISUI IS RIGHT NOW?
YOU KNOW HER. SHE'S THE ELUSIVE TYPE WHO POPS UP WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT HER.
XIAOLAN HAS STARTED USING MORE COMPLEX WORDS. MUST BE THOSE CLASSES...


I MEAN, SHE MUST BE SOME-WHERE...
YEAH ?!
WHERE? TELL ME!
THEY'RE BEING EVASIVE.
UMM, I THINK I MIGHT'VE SEEN HER?
MAIDS LIKE XIAOLAN ARE PRETTY RARE. NOT EVERYONE'S COMFORTABLE BEING OPEN WITH ANYONE AND EVERYONE.
?
MAYBE THEY'RE BEING CAUTIOUS SINCE THEY DON'T KNOW ME, AND I'M CLEARLY ATTACHED TO A CONSORT'S HOUSEHOLD.
OOH.
I'LL GIVE YOU THIS IF YOU TELL US WHAT YOU KNOW.
FWISH

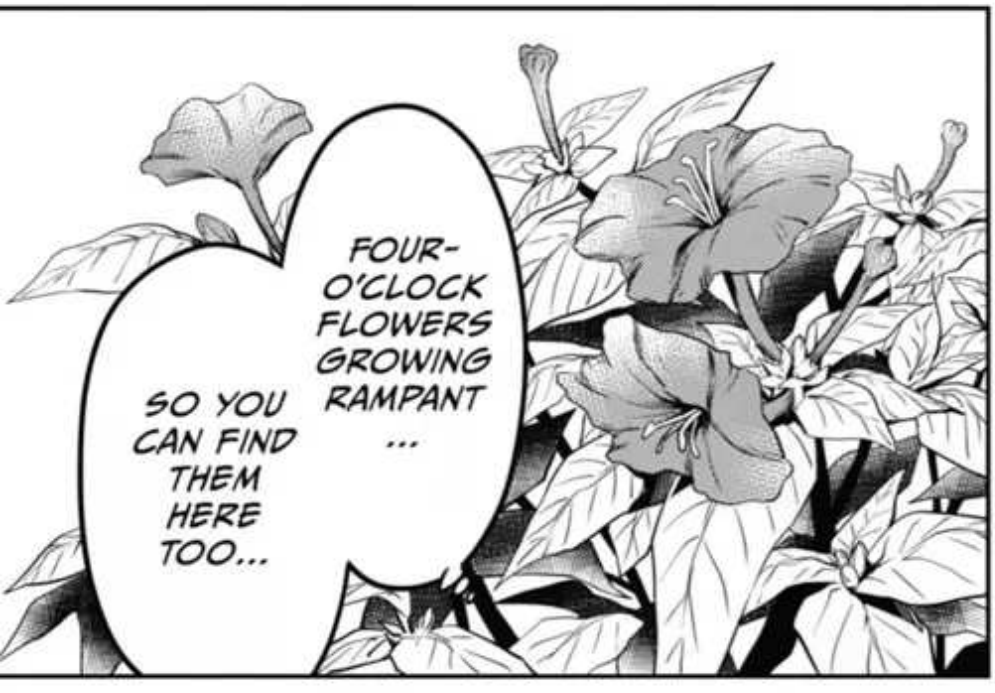

...IS THAT...HIS PERFUME?!
I SHALL LEAVE THAT TO YOUR IMAGINATION.
JINSHI GAVE IT TO ME THE OTHER DAY...
...AFTER XING STRUCK ME.
I'D SAY THIS THING IS HARDLY SERVICEABLE AS A TOWEL, THOUGH.


BZZZZ!
BZZZZ!


SO WILL YOU TELL US?
NOD NOD


I'M PRETTY SURE THIS IS WHERE I MET SHISUI BEFORE.
I GUESS SHE MUST BE FOND OF THIS NORTHERLY GROVE.


THE FLYING INSECTS ARE OUT IN FORCE. MUST BE SUMMER...
IF ONLY I'D BROUGHT SOME OF THE MUGWORT OR FRESH PINE NEEDLES WE USE AT THE JADE PALACE...
I COULD HAVE BURNED THEM FOR MOSQUITO REPELLENT.

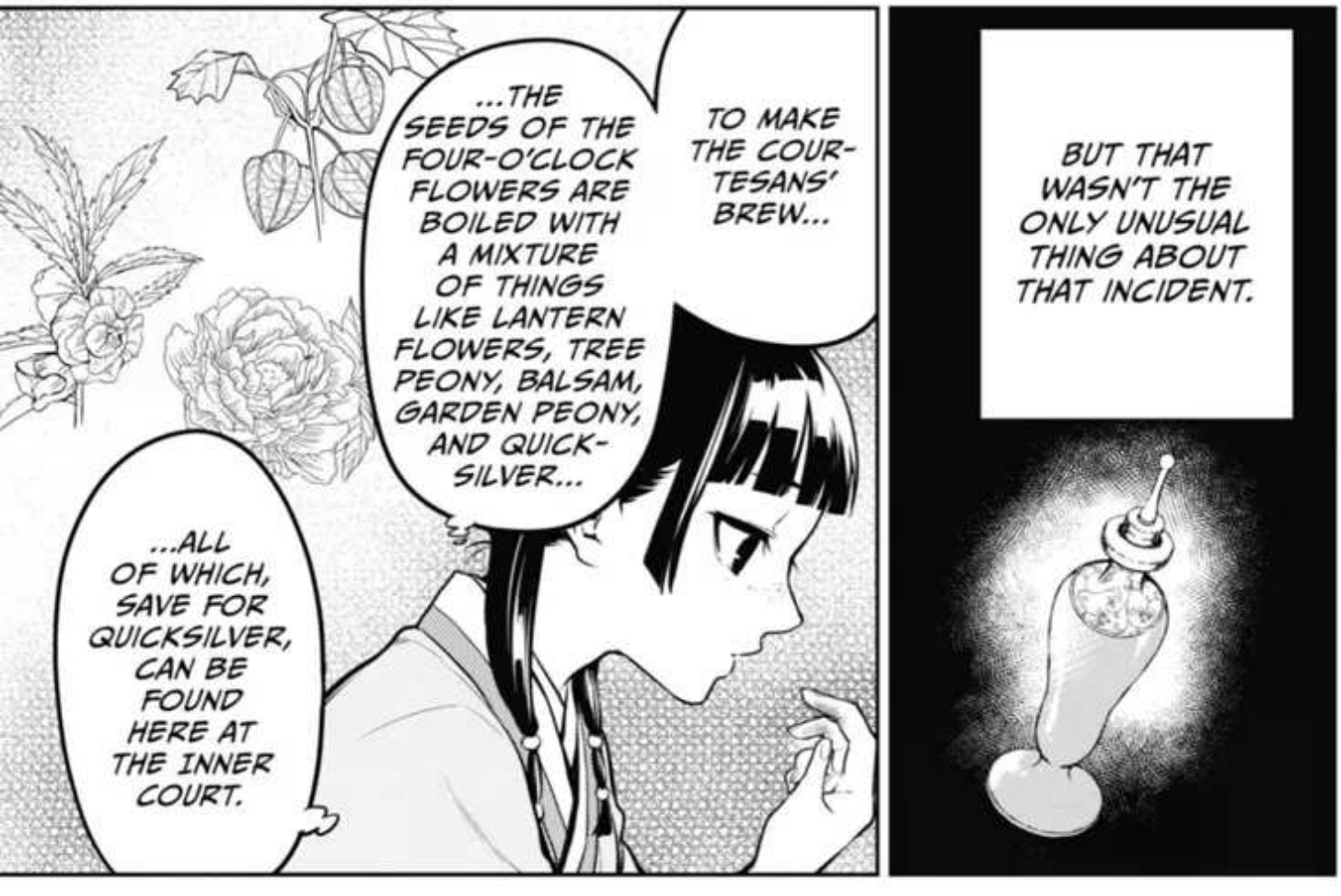

FOUR-O'CLOCK FLOWERS GROWING RAMPANT ...
SO YOU CAN FIND THEM HERE TOO...

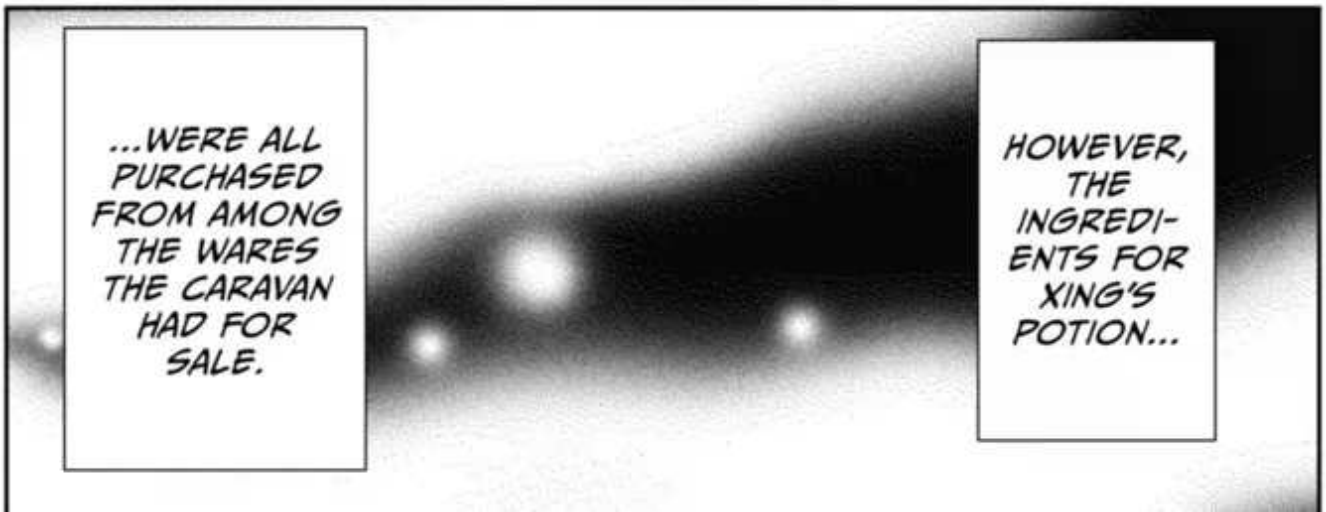


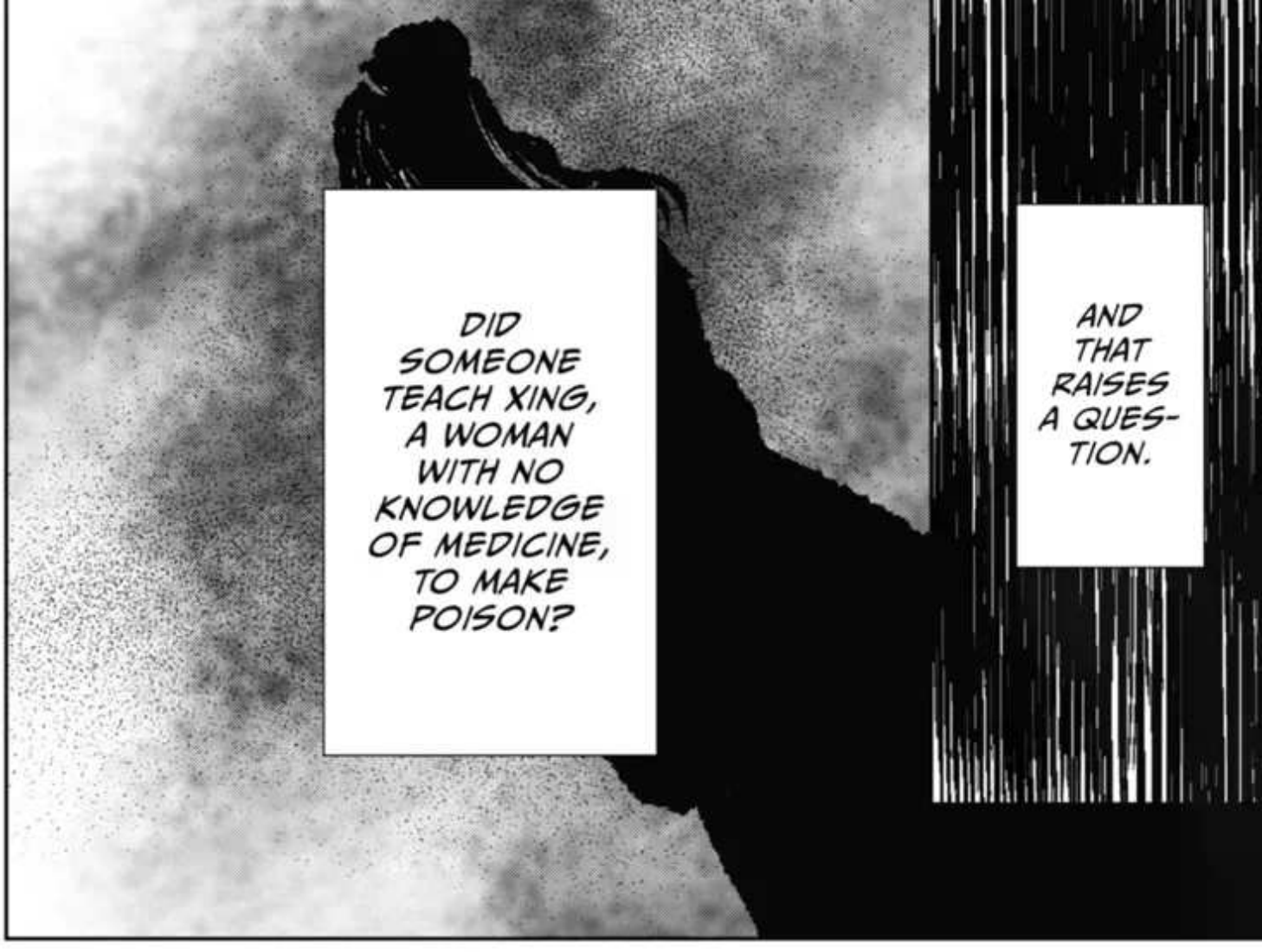

WHEN I WAS LITTLE, THE COURTESANS AND I WOULD GO OUT AND COLLECT THEIR SEEDS.
PLUCK
NOT TO USE THE POWDER WITHIN FOR MAKEUP...
...BUT FOR SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY.


A POTION TO INDUCE MISCAR-RIAGE.
XING, WHO WAS TRYING TO BREW JUST THAT, WASN'T IN THE HABIT OF WEARING ANY PERFUME ON HER PERSON.
SHE'D BEEN TRYING TO STEAL CONSORT LIHUA'S POSITION ...
...SO IT'S NOT ODD THAT SHE WOULD AVOID FRAGRANCES THAT COULD POTENTIALLY ABORT A PREGNANCY.
BUT THAT VERY SAME WOMAN THEN TOOK TO BREWING AN ABORTIVE POTION WITH SUCH FERVOR THAT THE SMELL OF IT CLUNG TO HER LIKE PERFUME.
THAT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE ...


THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE CONSORT LIHUA IS PREGNANT AS WELL.
...CONSORT GYOKUYO ISN'T THE EMPEROR'S ONLY FAVORITE.


TO MAKE THE COURTESANS' BREW...
...THE SEEDS OF THE FOUR-O'CLOCK FLOWERS ARE BOILED WITH A MIXTURE OF THINGS LIKE LANTERN FLOWERS, TREE PEONY, BALSAM, GARDEN PEONY, AND QUICKSILVER...
...ALL OF WHICH, SAVE FOR QUICKSILVER, CAN BE FOUND HERE AT THE INNER COURT.
BUT THAT WASN'T THE ONLY UNUSUAL THING ABOUT THAT INCIDENT.


...WERE ALL PURCHASED FROM AMONG THE WARES THE CARAVAN HAD FOR SALE.
HOWEVER, THE INGREDIENTS FOR XING'S POTION...


AND THAT RAISES A QUES-TION.
DID SOMEONE TEACH XING, A WOMAN WITH NO KNOWLEDGE OF MEDICINE, TO MAKE POISON?


AND IS THAT PERSON STILL HERE...
...AT THE INNER COURT?
KREEEE
KREEEE
RUSTLE


BOING
BOING
BOING
BOING
GOTCHA!
I'M SO GALLED TO HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN...
...FOR HER.
HOP
KREEEE
KREEEE

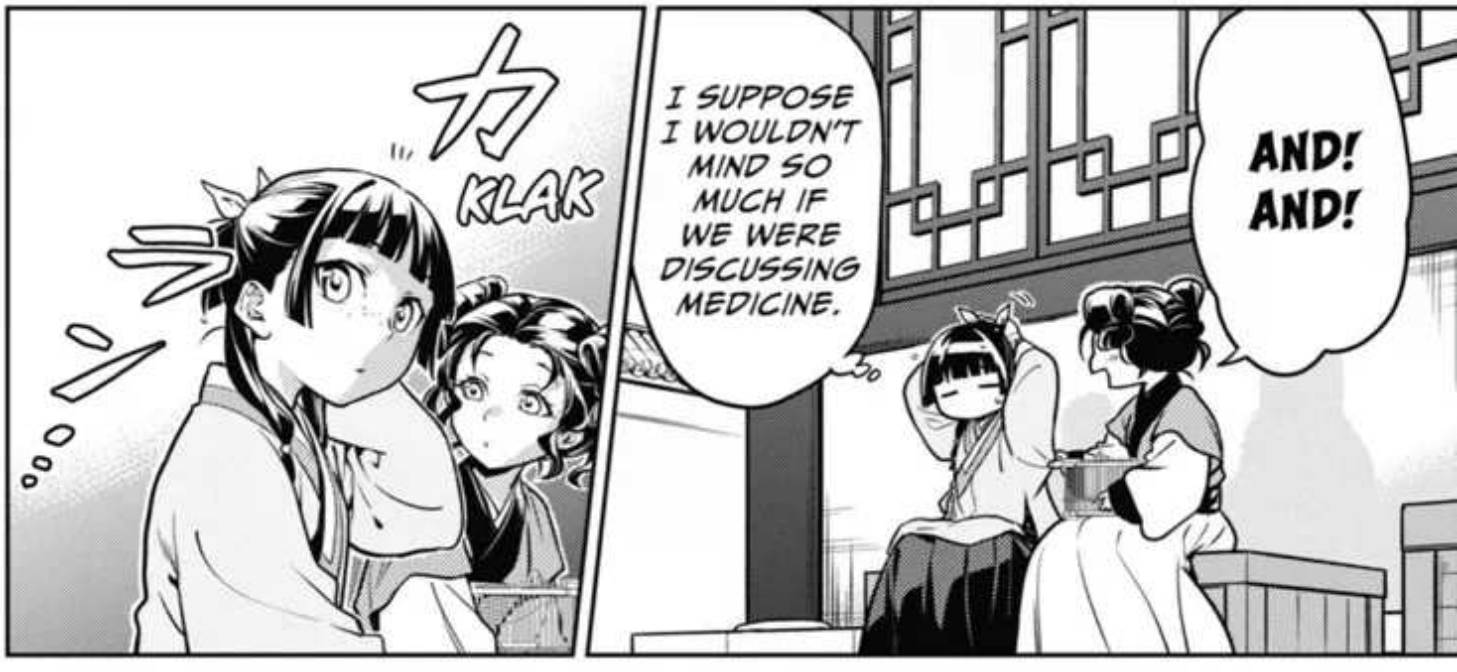

CRUNCH
BUUUG!


OOPS.


I DON'T WANT TO HAVE A BUG STUCK ON MY HEAD FOREVER.
...GET OFF ME, ALREADY.


...WERE YOU OUT HUNTING FOR THOSE BUGS?
UH-HUH!
I'M SO SORRY ABOUT THAT, MAOMAO.
KABLOOSH
HM?
TROT
TROT
SIT
HMM ...?
SHE SURE LOVES HER INSECTS.
DWEEE HEEE!


NOW I WISH I HADN'T ASKED.
I KNOW THEY LOOK LIKE COCK-ROACHES, BUT THEY'RE A DIFFERENT SPECIES ENTIRELY, SO THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT!
OH!
THIS INSECT IS ACTUALLY NATIVE TO AN ISLAND NATION TO THE EAST! IT MAKES SOUNDS BY VIBRATING ITS WINGS! I BET IT STOWED AWAY IN SOME TRADE GOODS THAT WERE BEING SHIPPED AND ESCAPED TO FREEDOM! I BET THEY CAN ONLY BE FOUND HERE, JUST LIKE THOSE MOTHS WE CAUGHT BEFORE!
BLAB
BLAB
BLAB


KLAK
I SUPPOSE I WOULDN'T MIND SO MUCH IF WE WERE DISCUSSING MEDICINE.
AND! AND!


KLAK
KLAK


FEW PEOPLE CAN STRUT ABOUT THE INNER COURT WITH SUCH A LARGE ENTOURAGE.
THAT WOMAN DRESSED IN THE ELEGANT, COLORFUL ROBE AT THE CENTER OF THAT ONE...
...IS THE EMPRESS DOWA-GER.


SHE HASN'T CHANGED A BIT SINCE LAST YEAR'S GARDEN BANQUET.
SHE'S SO YOUNG, YOU'D NEVER IMAGINE HER TO BE THE MOTHER OF OUR NEATLY MUSTACHIOED EMPEROR!
...WELL, I SUPPOSE YOU COULD CALL IT A CONDI-TIONED REFLEX.
ONE OF THE VERY FIRST THINGS WE'RE TAUGHT IS TO KNEEL AND BOW OUR HEADS...
...WHEN-EVER SOME-ONE OF HIGHER STANDING WALKS BY.
...UHH...
WHY ARE YOU HIDING?
WHSPR
こそっ
WHY ARE YOU?
TECHNICALLY, I SHOULD BE DOING THAT AROUND JINSHI AND GAO SHUN AS WELL...
...BUT I TEND TO FORGET.
BEST BE MORE CAREFUL.

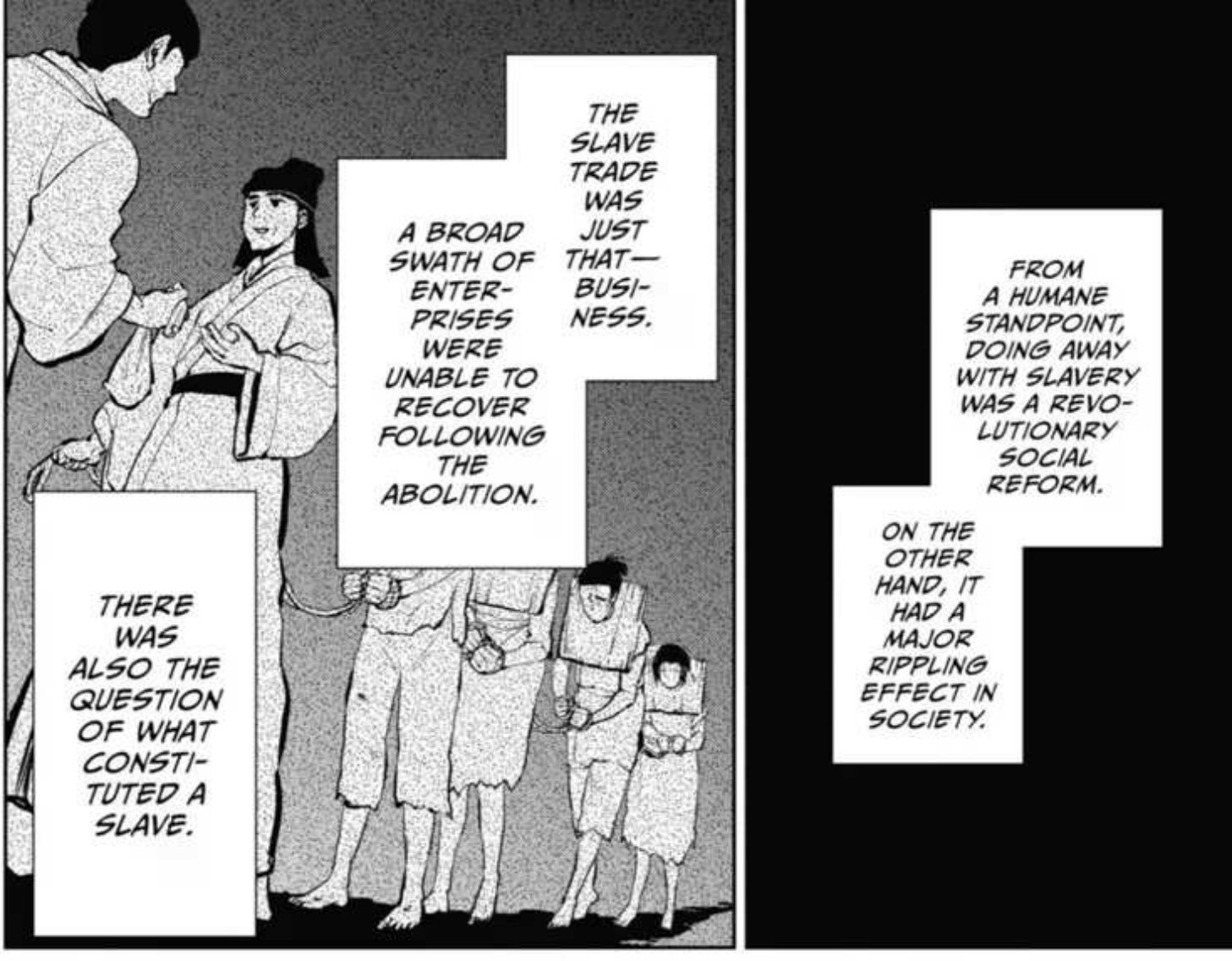

SHE IS?
OOH! MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE SHE'S THE ONE WHO STARTED IT.


I THINK THE CLINIC IS OVER THAT WAY.


PEOPLE SAY SHE'S A VERY COMPASSIONATE PERSON.
I'VE EVEN HEARD THAT SLAVERY WAS OUTLAWED AFTER SHE VENTURED THE SUGGESTION.


IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, IT WAS ESTABLISHED BACK WHEN THE EMPRESS HAD LOTS OF POWER.
AND IT'S STILL HERE TODAY BECAUSE OF HER.
OHH.

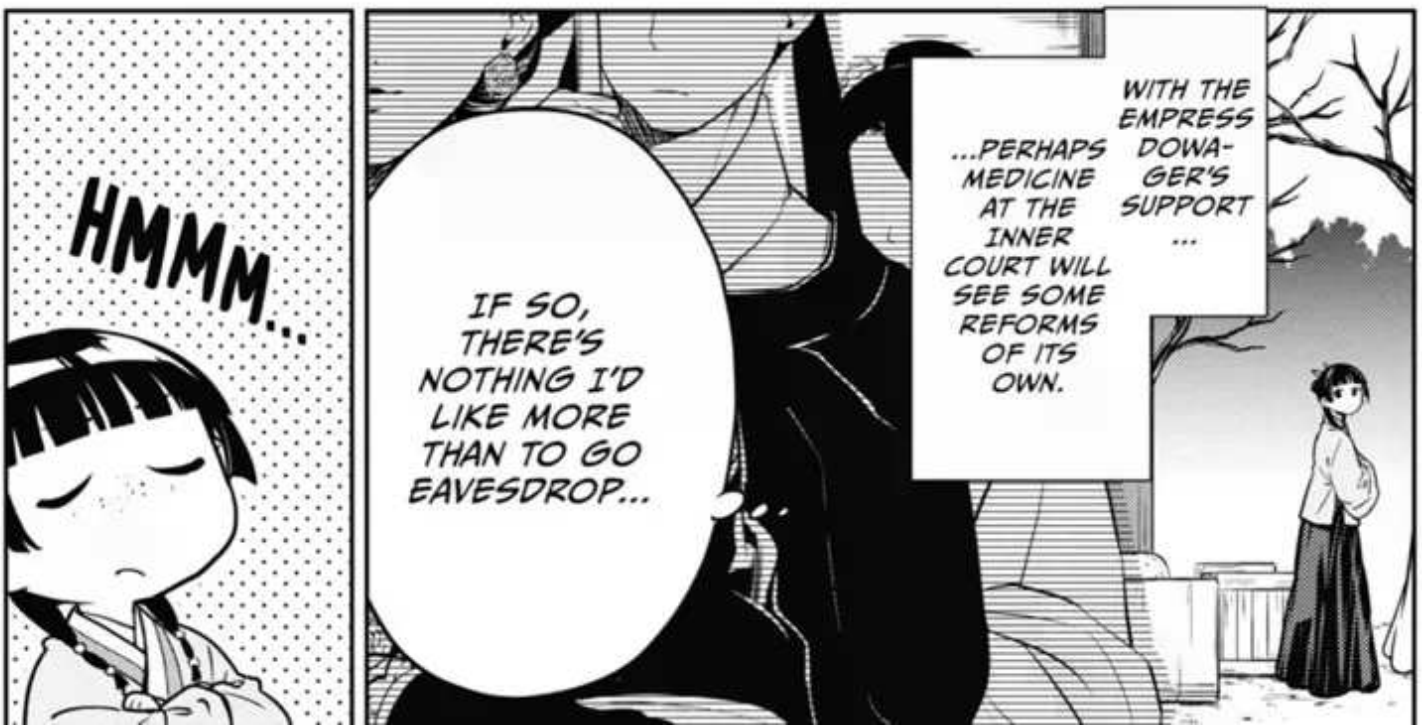

SO THAT'S WHAT BRINGS THE EMPRESS DOWAGER OUT OF HER WAY TO SUCH AN UNOFFICIAL PART OF THE INNER COURT.


THERE WAS ALSO THE QUESTION OF WHAT CONSTI-TUTED A SLAVE.
A BROAD SWATH OF ENTER-PRISES WERE UNABLE TO RECOVER FOLLOWING THE ABOLITION.
THE SLAVE TRADE WAS JUST THAT— BUSI-NESS.
FROM A HUMANE STANDPOINT, DOING AWAY WITH SLAVERY WAS A REVO-LUTIONARY SOCIAL REFORM.
ON THE OTHER HAND, IT HAD A MAJOR RIPPLING EFFECT IN SOCIETY.


IN FACT, THIS WAS THE VERY TOPIC THAT BROUGHT TOGETHER THE MADAMS OF THE PLEASURE DISTRICT FOR A GRIM-FACED DISCUSSION SOME YEARS EARLIER.
COURTESANS, WHO WERE PERFECTLY LEGAL, COULD BE VIEWED AS SLAVES BY THIS LATTER DEFINITION.
...BUT WHAT IF SOMEONE HAD BEEN PUT UP AS COLLATERAL FOR A DEBT? THIS TOO WAS A KIND OF SLAVERY IN THE SEMBLANCE OF EMPLOY-MENT.
IN THE CASES OF SLAVES WHO WERE TREATED LIKE LIVE-STOCK, IT WAS OBVIOUS ENOUGH...


ON THE FACE OF IT, SLAVERY HAS BEEN WIPED OUT...
...BUT EVERYONE KNOWS IT STILL EXISTS UNDER OTHER NAMES TODAY.
I'D BETTER GET GOING.
YOU SHOULD PROBABLY GET BACK SOON TOO SO YOU DON'T GET YELLED AT, RIGHT?
YES, BUT...

I WONDER IF THE EMPRESS DOWAGER VISITING THE CLINIC...
...HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE THE OTHER DAY.


WITH THE EMPRESS DOWAGER'S SUPPORT ...
...PERHAPS MEDICINE AT THE INNER COURT WILL SEE SOME REFORMS OF ITS OWN.
IF SO, THERE'S NOTHING I'D LIKE MORE THAN TO GO EAVESDROP...
HMMM...

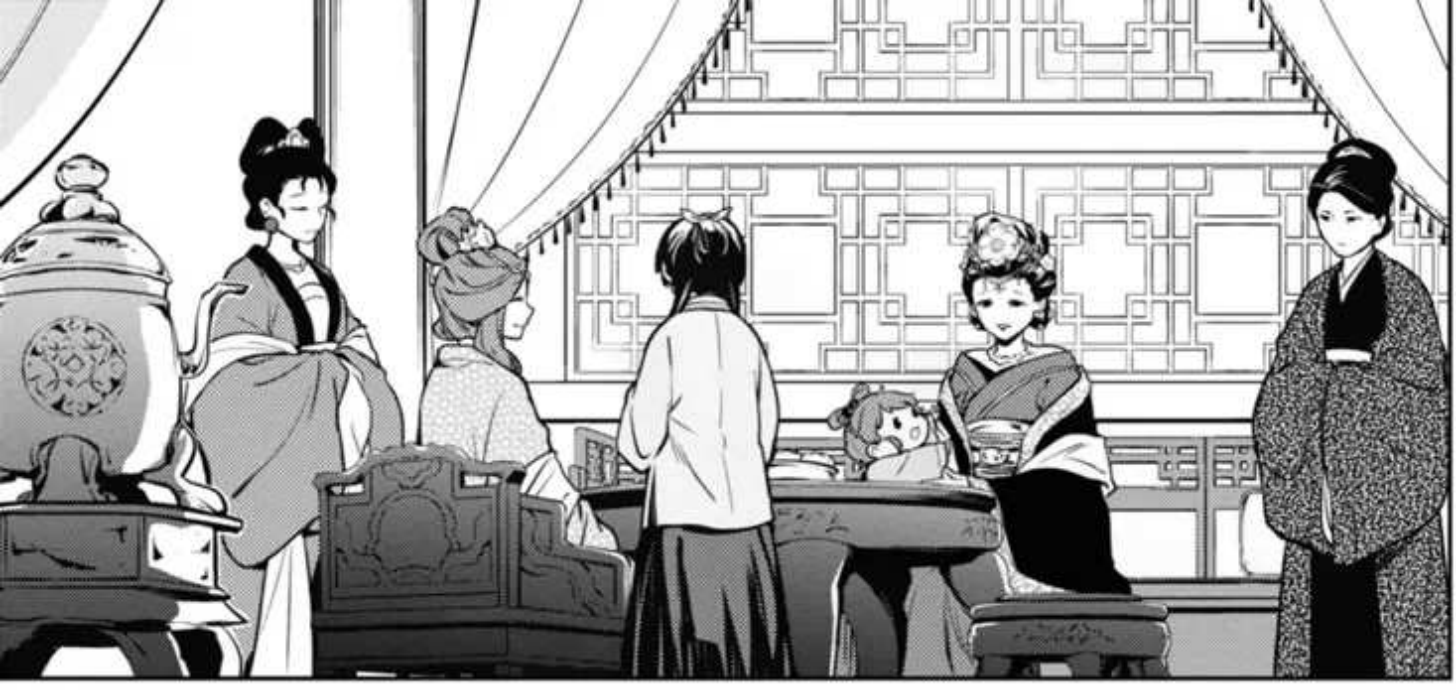

...SINCE IT FEELS LIKE I CAN'T DO ANYTHING RIGHT THESE DAYS.
GUESS I'LL HEAD BACK TOO...
SEE YOU LATER!
DO IT AGAIN.
ARE WE HAVING VISITORS?
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I LAST CLEANED AT THE JADE PALACE.
YES'M...
THIS MAKES THE THIRD TIME.
I'LL DO IT AGAIIIIN!
YOU CALL THAT CLEAN?!
SHE'S BEING SO MUCH MORE RIGOR-OUS THAN USUAL.
...BUT THE OTHER LADIES ARE GETTING CALLED OUT LEFT AND RIGHT TOO.
I THOUGHT SHE'D FINALLY TAKEN TO PICKING ON ME...


IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE YOUR LAST VISIT, EMPRESS DOWAGER ANSHI.
THE EMPRESS DOWAGER IN THE FLESH!




IF THE RUMORS SPEAK TRUE OF THE EMPRESS DOWAGER'S CHARACTER, IT MUST BE THE FORMER.
I CAN'T SAY FOR SURE.


IS THE EXCEPTION-ALLY WARY CONSORT GYOKUYO INFORMING THE EMPRESS DOWAGER OF HER PREGNANCY ...
...OUT OF TRUST?
OR OUT OF OBLIGA-TION?




YOU THERE, YOUNG LADY.
EVEN THE SHY PRINCESS HAS WARMED UP TO HER TOTALLY.
BUT THIS IS AN AMICABLE ATMO-SPHERE.


...HOW DOES SHE KNOW THAT?
YES, YOU ARE CORRECT, YOUR MAJESTY.
AM I RIGHT IN THINKING THAT YOU ARE THE MAID WHOSE EMPLOYMENT HERE WAS ARRANGED BY JINSHI?

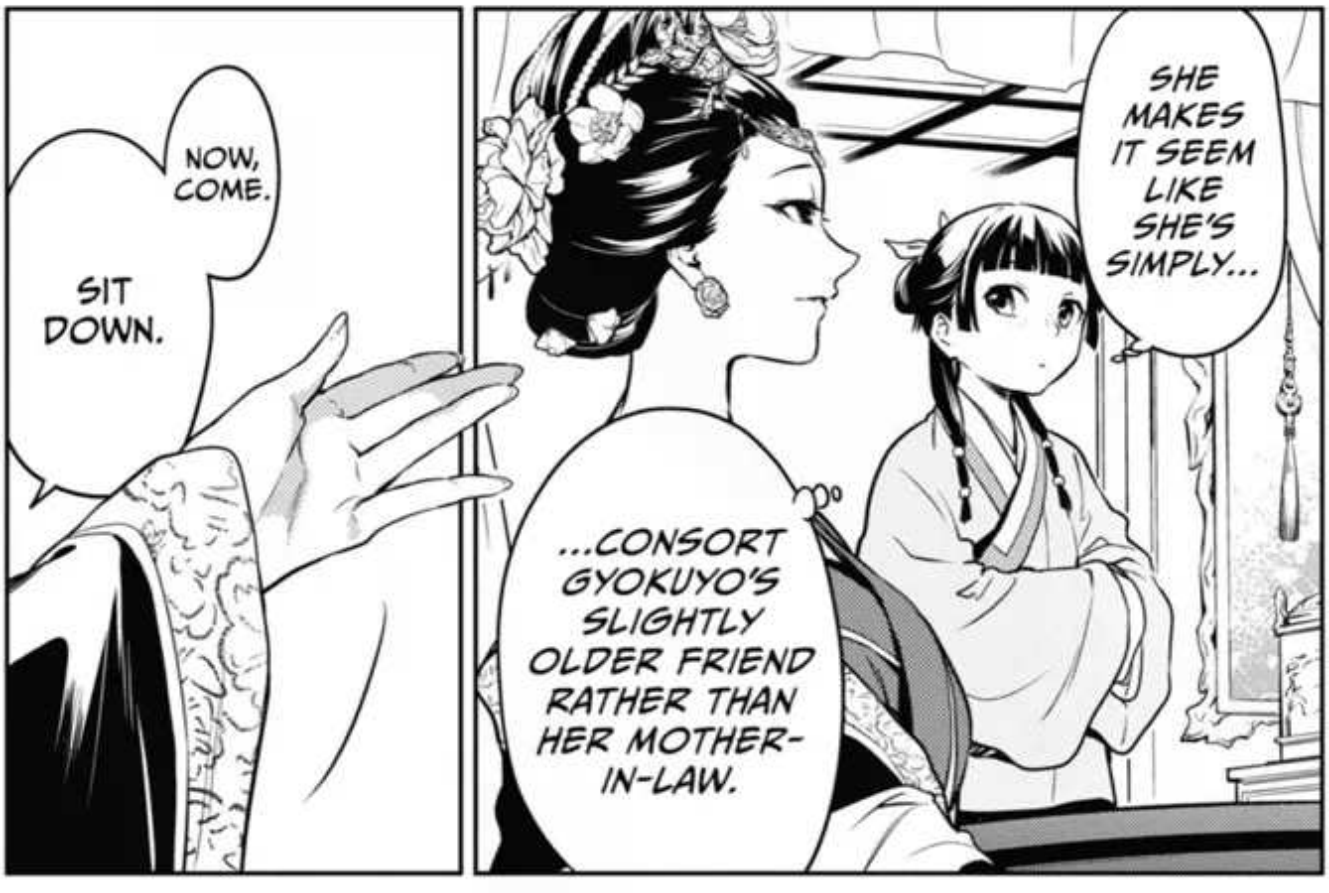

HOH HOH HOH!
SO HER MAJESTY AND THAT TOUGH ATTENDANT ARE OLD PALS?

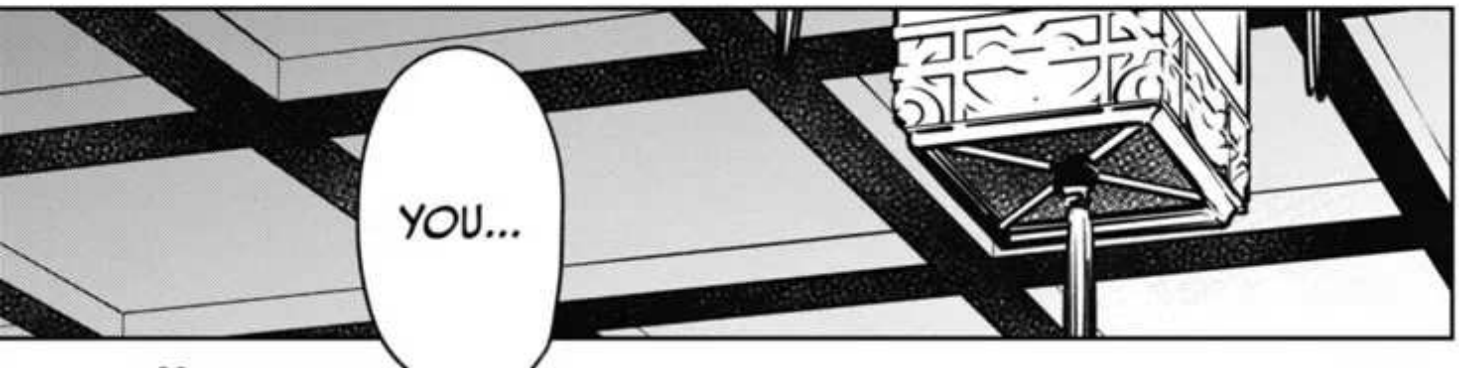

I HEARD ABOUT YOU FROM SUIREN.
SHE TOLD ME THE MAID SHE'D FOUND TO BE UP TO THE TASK OF HER TUTELAGE HAD RETURNED TO THE INNER COURT.
SUIREN WAS MY LADY-IN-WAITING A LONG TIME AGO, YOU SEE.


YOUR MAJESTY, I DO APOL-OGIZE...
...BUT I THINK IT MAY BE TIME FOR THE PRINCESS'S NAP.


GLANCE


WHAT AN INCREDIBLY PERCEPTIVE WOMAN.


NOW, COME.
SIT DOWN.
SHE MAKES IT SEEM LIKE SHE'S SIMPLY...
...CONSORT GYOKUYO'S SLIGHTLY OLDER FRIEND RATHER THAN HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.


YOU...


I...
...SEEM TO HAVE A KNACK FOR SOLVING ALL KINDS OF PROBLEMS, FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD.
...JUST PICK AND CHOOSE FROM WHAT KNOWLEDGE I HAVE...
...AND PRESENT WHAT APPLIES TO A GIVEN SITUATION. NOTHING MORE.
I HOPE THAT DIDN'T COME ACROSS AS ME DIS-AGREEING WITH HER.


BUT I HAVE NEITHER A WILD IMAGINA-TION...
...NOR THE LEARNING OF MY FATHER.
THAT'S WHY I INSIST ON A DISCLAIMER. THESE ARE THE WORDS I LIVE BY.
GRRK
SURE, I TOUCH ON THE TRUTH HERE AND THERE...
...BUT I BET PA WOULD'VE GOTTEN TO EVERY ONE OF THOSE SOLUTIONS IN HALF THE TIME.


IT'S FINE TO USE ONLY WHAT YOU KNOW.


KLINK
YOU'LL HEAR NO QUIBBLE FROM ME.


THERE'S SOMETHING I WOULD LIKE YOU TO INVESTIGATE FOR ME.
I WISH TO KNOW...
...IF I CAST A CURSE ON THE LATE EMPEROR.

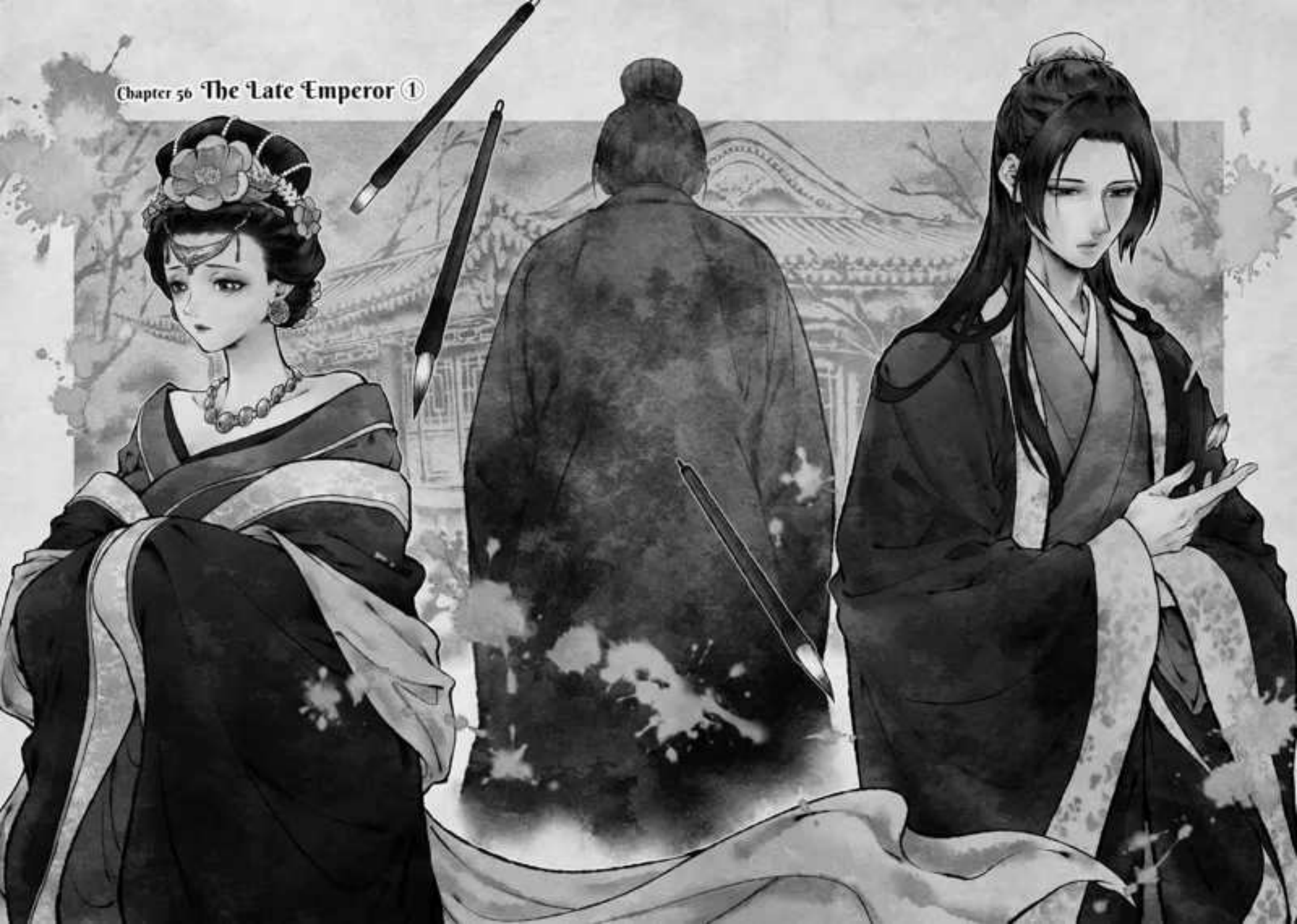

A CURSE ...?

Chapter 56

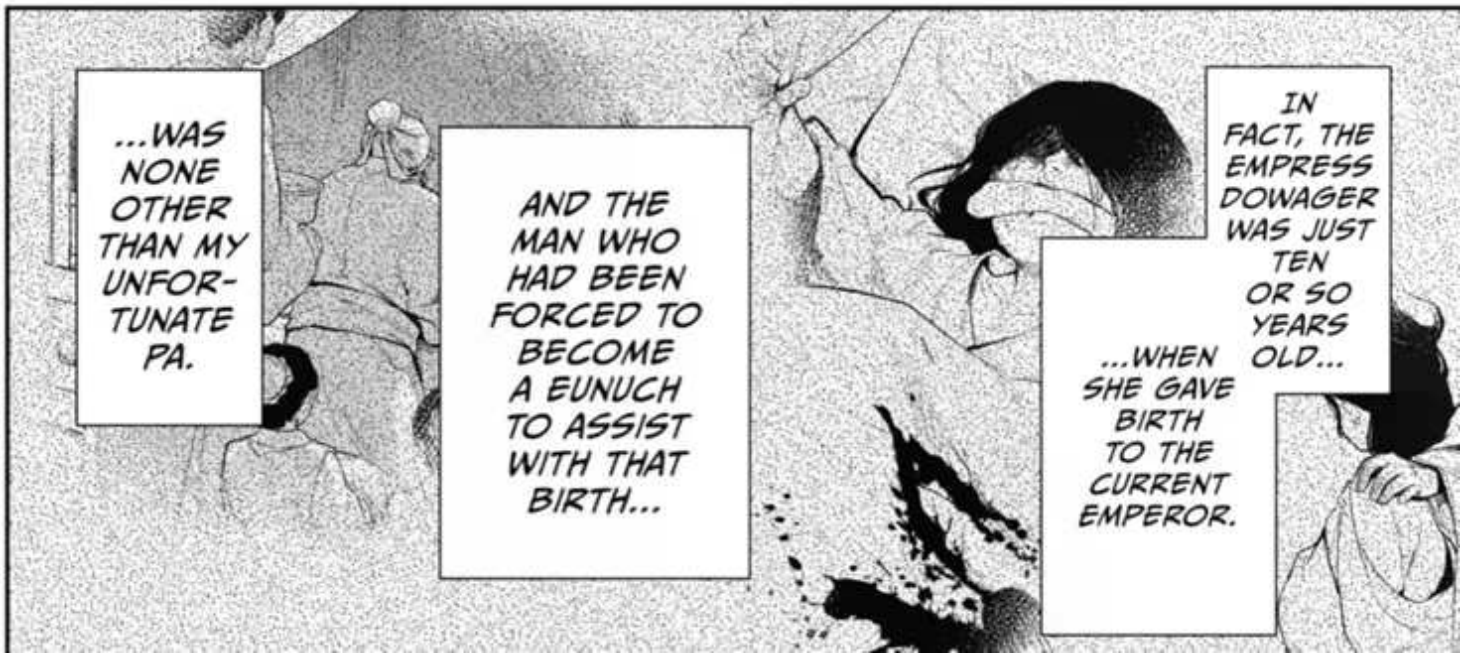
I SUPPOSE THAT'S ONE WAY OF LOOKING AT IT.


WOULD YOU MIND IF WE CONTINUE THIS CONVERSATION ELSEWHERE?

Chapter 56 The Late Emperor ①

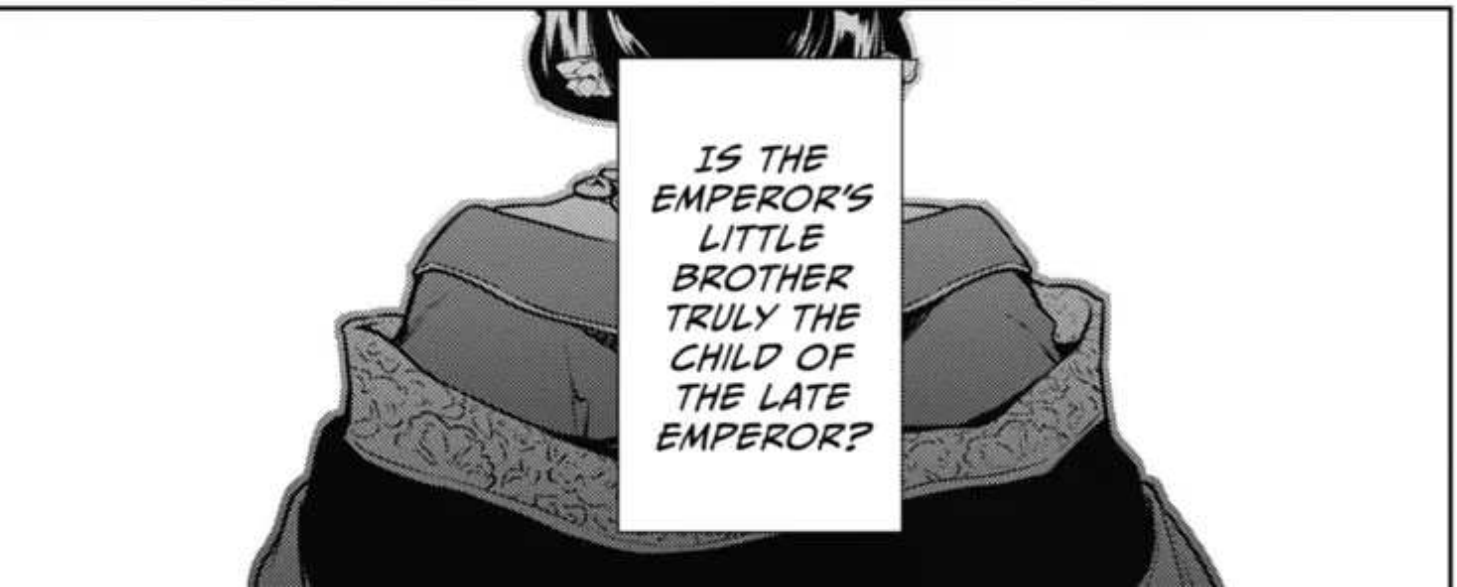



I HAVEN'T HEARD A SINGLE GOOD THING ABOUT THE LATE EMPEROR.
"HIS TRAVESTY," THE FOOLISH RULER. THE PUPPET OF THE EMPRESS.
AT THE INNER COURT, HE WAS PROBABLY BEST KNOWN FOR HIS PREDILECTION FOR LITTLE GIRLS.
IT WAS COMMON FOR MEN TO TAKE YOUNG WIVES FOR POLITICAL REASONS OR IN REPAYMENT FOR A DEBT.
BUT WHILE THE LATE EMPEROR HAD A HAREM FULL OF NUBILE WOMEN...
...IT WAS CONSIS-TENTLY THE VERY YOUNGEST OF THEIR NUMBER HE WOULD BED, GIVEN HIS TASTES.


IN FACT, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WAS JUST TEN OR SO YEARS OLD...
...WHEN SHE GAVE BIRTH TO THE CURRENT EMPEROR.
AND THE MAN WHO HAD BEEN FORCED TO BECOME A EUNUCH TO ASSIST WITH THAT BIRTH...
...WAS NONE OTHER THAN MY UNFOR-TUNATE PA.


AND DESPITE THE GREAT SCAR THAT MARRED HER BELLY, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WENT ON TO GIVE BIRTH TO THE EMPEROR'S LITTLE BROTHER TOO.
...THE CURRENT EMPEROR GREW UP STRONG AND HEALTHY.
PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THE SACRIFICE IT TOOK TO BRING HIM INTO THE WORLD...


FAR PAST THE AGE TO BE CONSIDERED A GIRL.
...AND THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WAS JUST SHY OF 30 WHEN SHE BORE HIM.
AS I RECALL, THE BROTHER IS A YEAR OLDER THAN ME...
...BUT SOMETHING HAS JUST OCCURRED TO ME.
I COULD NEVER SAY THIS OUT LOUD...


IS THE EMPEROR'S LITTLE BROTHER TRULY THE CHILD OF THE LATE EMPEROR?


A FEW DAYS LATER...
...THE EMPRESS DOWAGER ARRANGED FOR THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSORTS TO ASSEMBLE IN THE GUISE OF A VERY FINE TEA PARTY...
...IN THE AREA OF THE INNER COURT ...
...TYPICALLY RESERVED FOR THE EMPEROR, THE EMPRESS, AND THEIR CHILDREN TO RESIDE.
TO THE WOMEN OF THE INNER COURT, TEA PARTIES ARE A SORT OF COMPETITION FOR SHOWING OFF.
WE'VE BROUGHT SO MUCH THAT IT REQUIRES THREE EUNUCHS TO CARRY IT ALL.
IF CONSORT GYOKUYO'S GOT THIS MUCH, THEN THE OTHER CONSORTS' LADIES-IN-WAITING ARE PROBABLY BRINGING EVEN MORE.
WE CAN RELAX UNTIL THE TEA PARTY BEGINS.


CONSORT GYOKUYO IS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF HER PREGNANCY, SO SHE CONTINUES TO BE PRONE TO BOUTS OF SLEEPINESS.
EACH CONSORT WAS PROVIDED WITH...
...A COOL AND AIRY PRIVATE CHAMBER.
THERE'S EVEN CHILLED FRUIT FOR SNACKING.
I'M SURE SHE'S TRYING TO BE CONSIDERATE, BUT STILL...
UGH!
HMPH.
JUST WHAT IS SHE THINKING?
THE PREG-NANCY IS AN OPEN SECRET ...
...BUT A FACE-TO-FACE EVENT LIKE THIS COULD INVITE TACTLESS QUESTIONS ALL THE SAME.
THEY'RE GETTING AT THE FACT THAT IT'S STRANGE TO INVITE...
...A PREGNANT WOMAN TO A TEA PARTY.


BESIDES, CONSORT LIHUA IS NOBLE BY NATURE AS WELL AS BY BLOOD.
SHE DOESN'T MAKE A HABIT OF HUMILIATING HER RIVALS.
AS FOR CON-SORT GYOKUYO ...
...IT WOULD BE UNWISE FOR HER TO PICK A QUARREL WITH CONSORT LIHUA, WHO IS OF SUPERIOR BIRTH.
THE TWO WOMEN AVOID CONFLICT BY HAVING NO CONTACT WITH EACH OTHER.


I DOUBT CONSORT LIHUA WOULD MAKE SUCH INQUIRIES FOR FEAR OF THE SAME QUESTIONS BEING DIRECTED AT HER, THOUGH.


GOING BY HOW SHE WAS DRESSED DURING THE INCIDENT WITH XING...
...SHE HERSELF IS LIKELY PREGNANT TOO.


THE FORMER FOOD TASTER MUST NOT BE AS PUSHY AS THE OTHERS.
...BUT AT THE BANQUET, SHE ONLY HAD HER HEAD LADY-IN-WAITING AT HER SIDE.
...IS EASILY JERKED AROUND BY HER ATTEN-DANTS...
MEAN-WHILE, CONSORT LISHU...


YOUR FOOD-TASTING SERVICES WON'T BE REQUIRED TODAY.
OUR LADY AND I SHOULD BE EATING THE SAME THINGS.


NOT SURE WHAT TO EXPECT FROM CONSORT LOULAN, ABOUT WHOM I HAVEN'T HEARD ANY RUMORS, CURIOUSLY ENOUGH...
...NOR THE HOSTESS OF THIS TEA PARTY, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER...
MAO-MAO.


IT'S ONE OF THOSE PARTIES, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.
ALL RIGHT.


SO THE HEAD LADIES-IN-WAITING WILL BE EATING THE SAME FOOD AS THEIR CONSORTS AS A COMPROMISE.
BUT SHOULD WORSE COME TO WORST, THE QUESTION OF WHO IS AT FAULT WOULD ARISE.
THE CONSORTS REFRAIN FROM USING FOOD TASTERS HERE...
...TO SHOW THE EMPRESS DOWAGER THEY TRUST THAT WHAT SHE IS SERVING THEM IS NOT POISONED.
WHAT A HUGE BOTHER.


OKAY.
THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WOULD LIKE TO BORROW YOU.
BUT YOU DO HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.


.....
DON'T TELL ME YET ANOTHER PERSON HAS COME TO YOU WITH THEIR PROBLEMS?


"OKAY" ...?


WELL, IT'S FINE.
I'M GUESSING YOU CAN'T TELL ME ABOUT IT, IN ANY CASE.
BUT!
SLAM
YOU WOULD DO WELL TO AVOID BETRAYING MY LADY.


...THE LAST THING I WANT IS TO HAVE YOU FOR AN ENEMY, LADY HONG-NIANG.
I'M GLAD WE UNDER-STAND EACH OTHER!
I'D LIKE TO STAY FRIENDS WITH YOU TOO!
CHEERY
UH-HUH.




CONSORT GYOKUYO'S LADIES REALLY ARE SOMETHING ELSE.
BOMP
BBMP

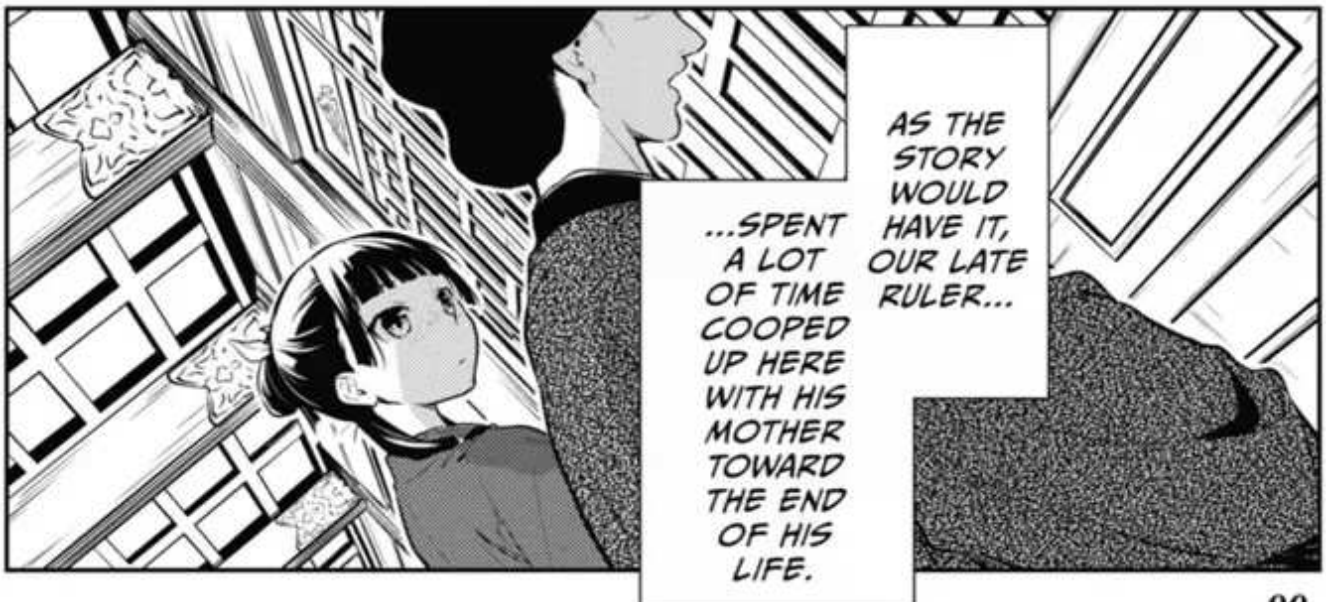

THIS AREA SERVED AS THE INNER COURT PRIOR TO THE INNER COURT WE KNOW TODAY BEING BUILT.
IS THAT RIGHT?
SHE TOLD ME BEFORE I EVEN ASKED.
THIS LADY WAS ATTENDING THE EMPRESS DOWAGER THE OTHER DAY TOO.
THE LONG BUILDINGS SURROUNDING THOSE WERE PROBABLY THE QUARTERS FOR OTHER COURT LADIES.
...MUST'VE BEEN COMPRISED OF THESE SIX PALACES I CAN SEE, WHICH WOULD'VE HOUSED THE CONSORTS.
THE OLD INNER COURT...


I DON'T SENSE ANYONE AROUND...
...BUT THEY MAKE A POINT OF KEEPING IT SPOTLESS. THERE'S NOT SO MUCH AS A SPECK OF DUST.
SHP
EVEN THE GRAVEL IN THE TRADITIONAL DRY LANDSCAPE GARDEN HAS BEEN RAKED NICE AND TIDY.


HERE WE ARE.
BETWEEN THE PALACES WE PASSED, HEADING STILL FARTHER BACK...
...UNTIL WE ARRIVED AT A LONG BUILDING WITH A CENTRAL CHAMBER SOMEWHAT BIGGER THAN THE REST.
CREAK
ギィ…
NOW THAT'S AN ODD SMELL.
FWOOSH


THIS PLACE HAS A CURIOUS AIR ABOUT IT.
I CAN TELL FROM A DISTANCE THAT EVERY-THING'S COVERED IN DUST.
THE FLOOR IS STRANGELY STAINED, AND EVEN THE WALLS HAVE A YELLOWISH CAST.


WHAT IS THIS PLACE ...?
THESE ARE THE QUARTERS OF THE WOMAN WHO WENT FROM BEING A MAID...
...TO BECOMING EMPRESS DURING THE RULE OF THE LATE EMPEROR'S PREDECES-SOR...
...FROM WHEN SHE WAS INSTALLED AS A LOW-RANKING CONSORT.
IT WAS HERE THAT THE LATE EMPEROR WAS RAISED...
...AND ALSO WHERE HE PASSED FROM THIS LIFE.


AS THE STORY WOULD HAVE IT, OUR LATE RULER...
...SPENT A LOT OF TIME COOPED UP HERE WITH HIS MOTHER TOWARD THE END OF HIS LIFE.


SHUTTING HIMSELF UP IN THIS ROOM SO HE COULD CLING TO HIS MEMORIES ...
THE LATE EMPEROR MUST HAVE BEEN FAINT OF HEART.
AFTER THE THEN EMPRESS DOWAGER PASSED, HE DREW HIS LAST BREATH IN THIS VERY ROOM...
...AS IF FOLLOWING HER IN DEATH.
UNLIKE THE PEASANTS AMONG THEIR SUBJECTS, WHO WERE THOUGHT WIZENED ELDERS PAST THE AGE OF 60...
...THE LATE EMPRESS DOWAGER WAS BLESSED WITH A LONG LIFE...
...AND THOUGH NOT AS LONG AS HERS, SO WAS THE LATE EMPEROR, HER SON.
...THAT SHE HAD CURSED HIM...
...BY WISHING HIM DEAD, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT.
WHEN THE LATE EMPEROR PASSED...
...I TOLD LADY ANSHI THAT THERE WERE NO SUCH THINGS AS CURSES.
BUT SHE CLAIMED...


IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE OF THIS CURSE?
THE LATE EMPEROR'S BODY WAS ENSHRINED IN THE MAUSOLEUM FOR A YEAR.


PEOPLE BEING MISTAKEN FOR DEAD AND COMING BACK TO LIFE ISN'T ENTIRELY UNHEARD OF...


PLUS, EVEN IF HIS TOMB HADN'T BEEN FINISHED WHILE HE WAS ALIVE...
...THERE WOULD'VE BEEN LITTLE REASON TO HASTEN THE CONSTRUCTION WITH HIS BODY ALREADY ENSHRINED.

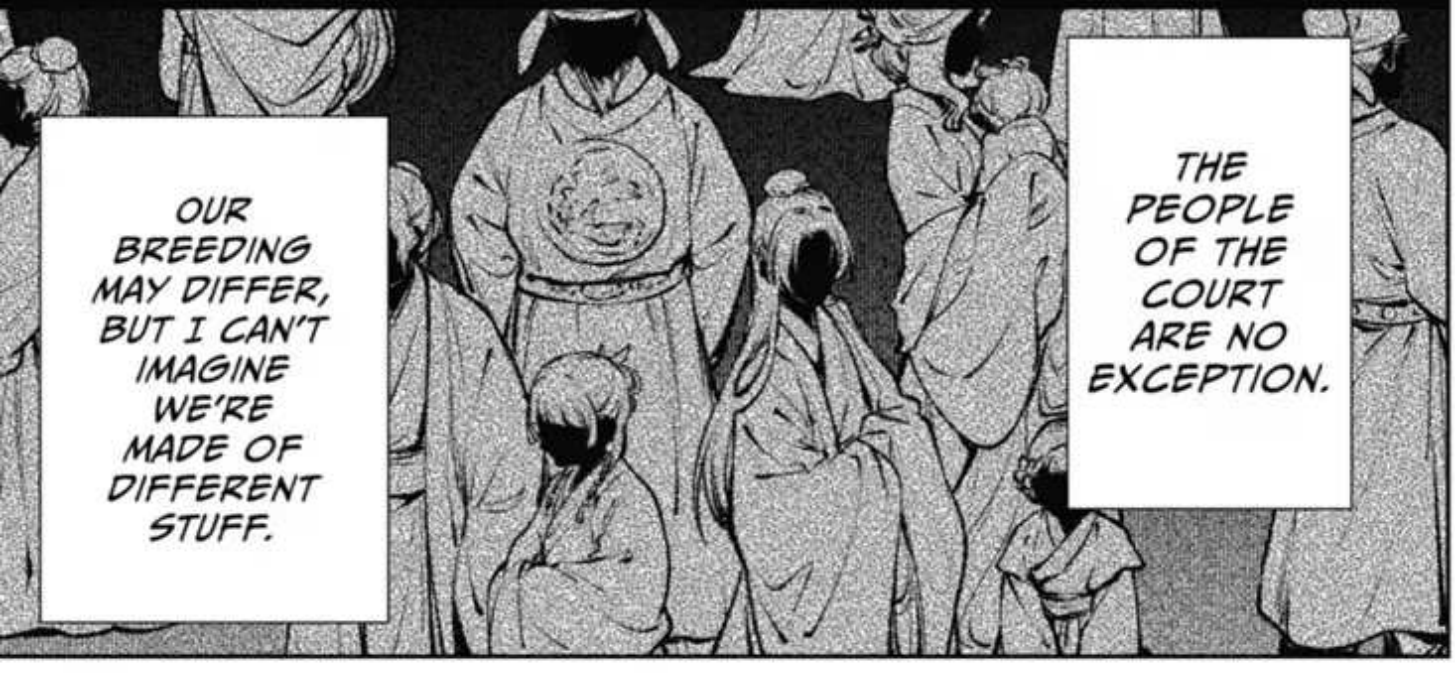

THE LATE EMPEROR LOOKED MUCH AS HE HAD IN LIFE...
...AND EVEN HIS MAJESTY WAS GIVEN TO THINK HIS FATHER MIGHT HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITH A WELL-CRAFTED DOLL.
THE FOLLOWING YEAR, THE EMPEROR AND MY LADY WENT TO RETRIEVE THE BODY...
...IN PREPARATION FOR BURIAL.
SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT HIS BODY HADN'T DECAYED?
BUT THEY WERE TOLD IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS THAT IT WAS THE LATE EMPEROR'S BODY.


YES.
THE MAUSOLEUM IS A COOL BUILDING, EVEN IN THE SUMMER.
HOWEVER, WHEN THE PAIR HAD GONE TO RETRIEVE THE PREVIOUS EMPRESS DOWAGER'S BODY, IT HAD BEEN IN AN UNSPEAKABLE STATE.
AND THEY WERE TOLD THAT WAS TO BE EXPECTED.


A CORPSE THAT DOESN'T IS AN ANOMALY, TO BE SURE.
UNLESS A BODY IS FROZEN ...
...IT WILL ROT, BECOME INFESTED WITH INSECTS, AND SHRIVEL AWAY WHEN LEFT ALONE.


NOW I UNDER-STAND.

WE ALL EVEN-TUALLY RETURN TO THE EARTH.



OUR BREEDING MAY DIFFER, BUT I CAN'T IMAGINE WE'RE MADE OF DIFFERENT STUFF.

THE PEOPLE OF THE COURT ARE NO EXCEPTION.



THE LATE EMPEROR PASSED SIX YEARS AGO.

HIS BODY HAS LONG SINCE BEEN INTERRED, SO THIS IS PROBABLY THE LAST PLACE THAT HOLDS ANY OF HIS MEMORIES.



THIS BUILDING IS SOON TO BE TORN DOWN.

WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO LOOK INTO THIS BEFORE THAT TIME COMES.


PARDON MY INSOLENCE, BUT MAY I ENTER THE CHAMBER?
...HMM.
UNLESS THIS MYSTERY IS SOLVED BEFORE THE DEMOLITION, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER WILL LIKELY NOT BE ABLE TO REST EASY.


VERY WELL. I SHALL ASK PER-MISSION.




IT SEEMS I'LL BE GOING BACK TO THAT ROOM TOMORROW.
LEAVE TO ENTER MUST BE GIVEN BY THE EMPEROR HIMSELF, I'M TOLD.
BUT I ASSUME HIS MAJESTY GRANTS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING THE EMPRESS DOWAGER REQUESTS OF HIM.
I'M NOT SURE IF SUIREN HAD SOME-THING TO DO WITH IT...
...BUT JINSHI AND GAO SHUN WILL APPARENTLY BE THERE TO BEAR WITNESS.
PHEW.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE BEEN BACK TO STAY OVER AT JINSHI'S.


THE THOUGHT OF HONGNIANG'S REACTION UPON MY RETURN TO THE JADE PALACE FRIGHTENS ME RIGHT NOW.
I BET SHE'S BEEN GOING EASY ON ME THUS FAR.



I CAN'T IMAGINE HONGNIANG, WHOSE JOB AS HEAD LADY-IN-WAITING IS TO PROTECT CONSORT GYOKUYO...

...THINKS TOO KINDLY OF A WOMAN OF THE COURT WHO FREQUENTS OTHER PALACES YET REMAINS ALIGNED WITH NONE OF THEM.

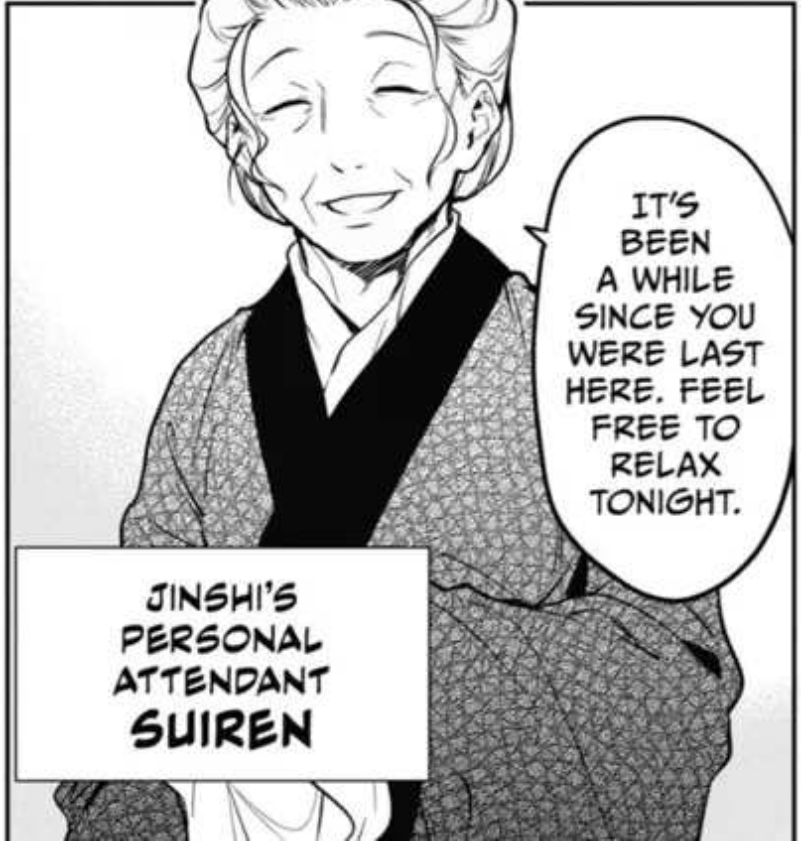


SOMETIMES...

...EVEN I'M UNSURE OF WHOSE SIDE I'M ON.

OF COURSE, I'D NEVER DREAM OF DOING ANYTHING TO HARM CONSORT GYOKUYO.

BUT NEITHER DO I WANT TO ASSIST HER IN GAINING ADVANTAGE OVER THE OTHER CONSORTS.



JINSHI'S PERSONAL ATTENDANT **SUIREN**

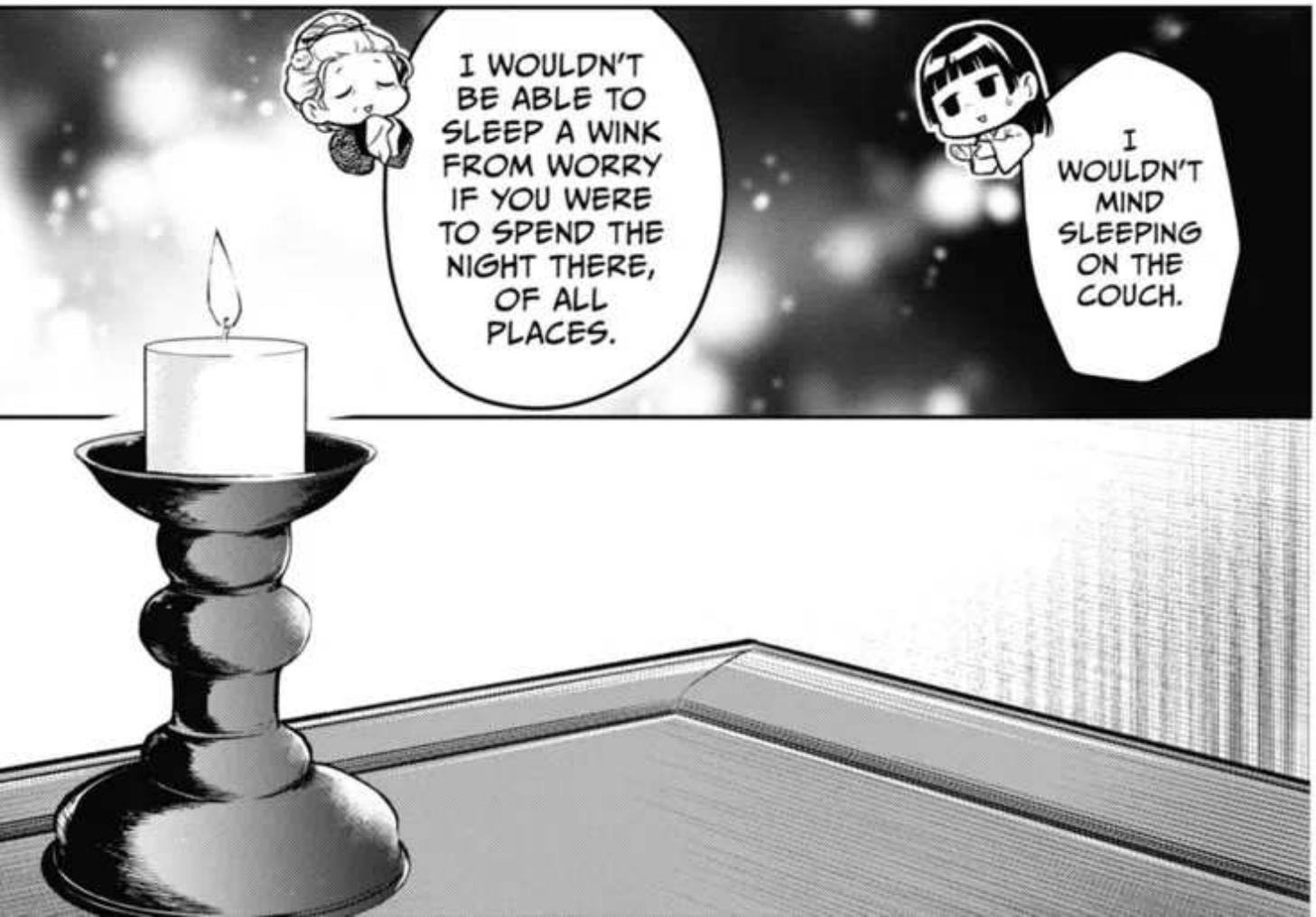
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU WERE LAST HERE. FEEL FREE TO RELAX TONIGHT.



YES.

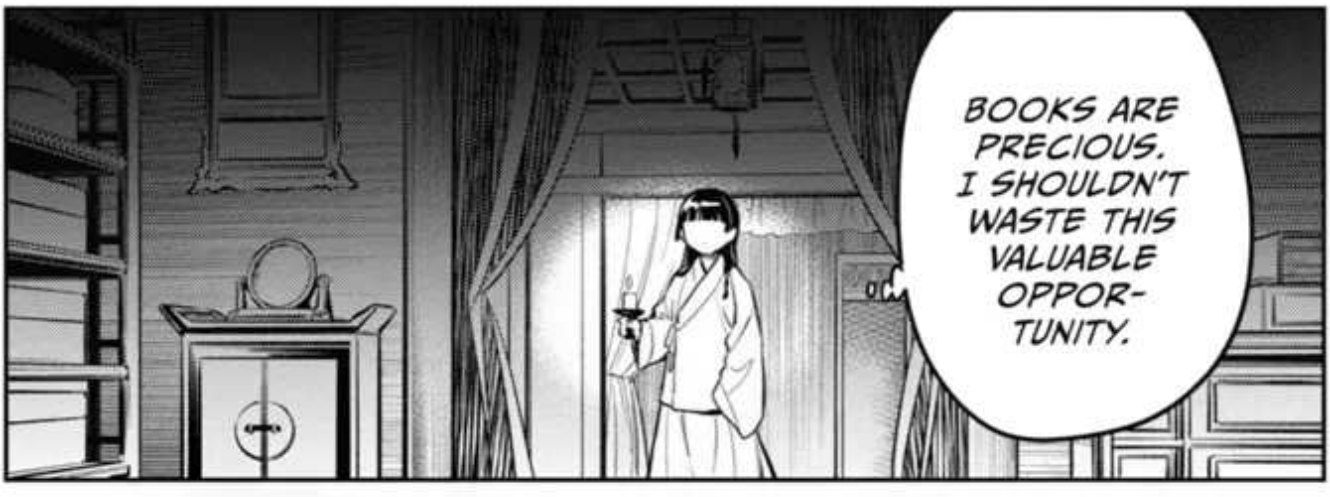
ARE YOU DONE GETTING DRESSED?


SOMEONE ELSE IS OCCUPYING THE ROOM I USED BEFORE...
...SO I'LL BE STAYING WITH SUIREN ...
...IN HER TWO ADJOINING ROOMS LOCATED IN A CORNER OF JINSHI'S RESIDENCE.
PLEASE SLEEP HERE TONIGHT.
A SIMPLE BED.
...BUT IT'S WELL-MADE AND PRETTILY DECO-RATED.


I WOULDN'T MIND SLEEPING ON THE COUCH.
I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SLEEP A WINK FROM WORRY IF YOU WERE TO SPEND THE NIGHT THERE, OF ALL PLACES.


IF YOU'RE IN THE MOOD TO READ TOO, GO AHEAD AND GRAB A BOOK FROM THE BACK ROOM.
THANK YOU.


WHAT A LUXURY TO BE ABLE TO READ BY CANDLE-LIGHT.


BOOKS ARE PRECIOUS. I SHOULDN'T WASTE THIS VALUABLE OPPOR-TUNITY.


SHUT
パタ


……


...SUIREN AND I SEEM TO HAVE RATHER DIFFERENT TASTES.
SHP
SHE MUST BE HOLDING ON TO HER INNER CHILD IF SHE'S READING THIS KIND OF THING.
A WICKER TRUNK EMBROIDERED WITH GOLDEN THREAD...
IT LOOKS OLD, BUT IT'S BEEN LOVINGLY PAINTED WITH PERSIMMON DYE.
JUMP
DOES THAT BOX PIQUE YOUR CURIOSITY?


FRET NOT.
I'D NEVER DREAM OF STEALING ANYTHING, MADAM.
OH, I KNOW, I KNOW.
ぽか
POP
CHILDREN'S TOYS?
THESE WERE MASTER JINSHI'S FAVORITES.
HE HAD EVER SO MANY TOYS BUT ONLY PLAYED WITH THOSE HE LIKED BEST...
...SO WE WOULD SECRETLY HIDE THEM.


WHEN ONE GROWS ATTACHED TO SOMETHING, THEY CEASE TO LOOK AT ANYTHING ELSE.
HE WASN'T BORN INTO A POSITION THAT WOULD ALLOW HIM TO DO THAT.
WHY DID YOU TAKE THEM AWAY?


BUT WHENEVER WE HID A TOY AWAY...
...HE WOULD CRY INCONSOL-ABLY.
WE NEEDED HIM TO GROW UP, WHETHER HE LIKED IT OR NOT.
THAT WAS HIS MOTHER'S WISH FOR HIM.
GAO SHUN WOULD GO TO GREAT PAINS TO BRING HIM ONE NEW TOY AFTER ANOTHER...
...BUT NOTHING WOULD CHEER HIM UP.


THIS DOLL OF CARVED WOOD HAS GAINED A DEEP LUSTER FROM ALL THE HANDLING.
FOR IT TO TURN THIS DARK FROM HANDS THAT NEVER KNEW DIRT...
...HE MUST'VE PLAYED WITH IT CONSTANTLY.
I'VE HEARD THAT GROWING UP IN AN OPPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENT CAN HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE HEART.
PERHAPS THE CURIOUSLY CHILDISH JINSHI I'VE GRADUALLY BEEN SEEING MORE OF...
...IS ONE FACET OF HIS TRUE NATURE.
AND YET, EVERYONE AROUND HIM INSISTS ON TREATING HIM LIKE THE BE-ALL AND END-ALL OF BEAUTIFUL EUNUCHS, WHICH MAKES THIS EVEN MORE ABSURD TO CONSIDER.


WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MASTER JINSHI?
TELL ME...


BEAR GALL
...BECAUSE HE GETS ME RARE MEDICINES AND INGRE-DIENTS.
BEZOAR
HE'S A GOOD BOSS.


SHAKE
SHAKE
ANYTHING YOU'D CARE TO ADD TO THAT STATE-MENT?


WHAT'S THAT SHEET OF PAPER?
...THIS IS...
FLIP
OH MY!
FWIP
SO THAT'S WHERE THIS OLD THING GOT TO!
I WAS TOLD TO THROW IT AWAY AND EVERYTHING, BUT HERE IT IS.
WHAT'S THAT REACTION ABOUT?
...HM?


MAY I...
...TOUCH THIS STONE?
AS YOU WISH.
I WONDER WHERE HE FOUND THAT.
THE YOUNG MASTER WAS NEVER ONE TO COLLECT ROCKS.
YOU DON'T NEED TO PICK IT UP WITH A TOWEL. IT'S JUST A PEBBLE.
DID YOU TAKE THIS FROM HIM RIGHT AWAY?


OH YES.
ROCKS PICKED UP OFF THE GROUND ARE QUITE DIRTY, YOU KNOW.
GOOD THING YOU DID.
THIS STONE IS TOXIC.


HOW COULD THAT BE?!
THAT'S WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.
HOW DID HE PICK UP SUCH A THING IN THE FIRST PLACE?
.....
PER-HAPS...
...SIR JINSHI WAS BROUGHT TO THE INNER COURT WHEN HE WAS A CHILD?
...YES, ON A FEW OCCA-SIONS.
BUT WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH THE STONE?
I CAN'T YET SAY FOR SURE.


I HAVE A THEORY...
...BUT I HAVE NO PROOF.
ALL WILL BECOME CLEAR TOMORROW, THOUGH.
WOULD YOU MIND WAITING UNTIL THEN?


Chapter 57
I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF THIS SINCE THINGS GET AWKWARD WHEN MY HUNCHES ARE WRONG...


Chapter 57 The Late Emperor ②


JUST A LITTLE WALKING'S KICKING UP ALL THIS DUST.
BUT I KNOW THAT MOLD ALONE ISN'T TO BLAME FOR THIS STRANGE ODOR.
AN ASSORT-MENT OF BRUSHES WITH FLAT TIPS...
JUST AS I THOUGHT ...


DID THE LATE EMPEROR TAKE UP PAINTING AS A HOBBY?
...HE PAINTED ME JUST ONCE.
?


JINSHI'S FINGER IS TWITCHING.
HE TOLD ME IT WAS OUR SECRET BECAUSE IT WOULD BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM IF ANYONE ELSE FOUND OUT.


IT'S A TIC OF HIS I'VE ONLY RECENTLY NOTICED.
HE APPEARS SERENE ON THE OUTSIDE, BUT I THINK HE MUST BE SHAKEN.
I DON'T KNOW ALL THAT MUCH ABOUT THE LATE EMPEROR ...
...NOR DO I CARE TO KNOW MUCH MORE THAN I ALREADY DO...
...BUT I NEED MORE INFORMATION IF I'M TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS "CURSE."
IS THIS WHERE HE PAINTED?
WE CANNOT SAY.
HOWEVER, ONCE THE LATE EMPEROR MADE A HABIT OF COMING HERE, HE WAS ALWAYS ATTENDED BY THE SAME SERVANT.
IF ANYONE KNOWS, IT WOULD BE HIM.

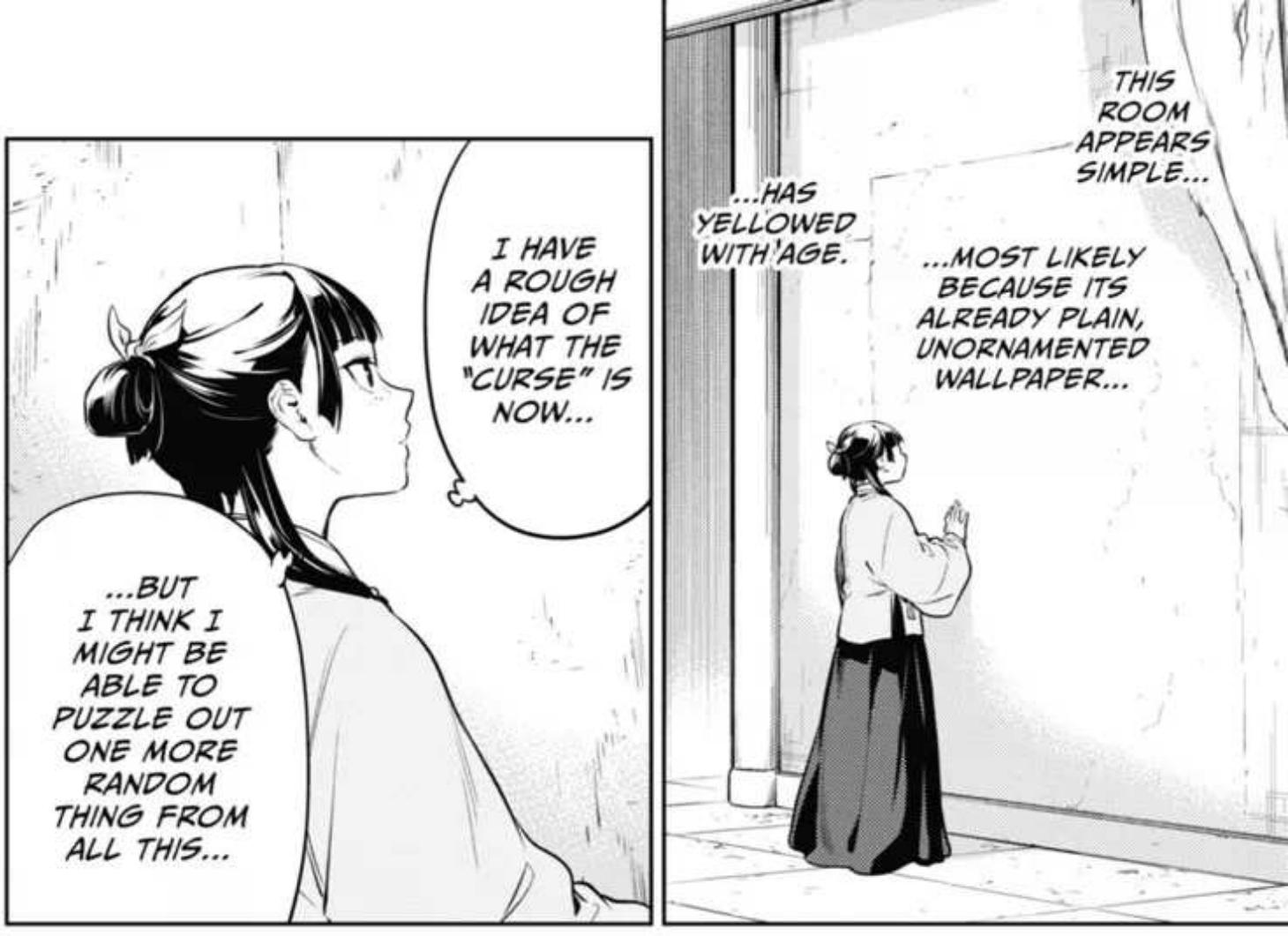

I SHALL GO FIND HIM, THEN.


WOULD YOU SUMMON HIM AT ONCE?
I BELIEVE HE WORKS HERE STILL...


MAY I TOUCH THESE BRUSHES?
GO AHEAD.

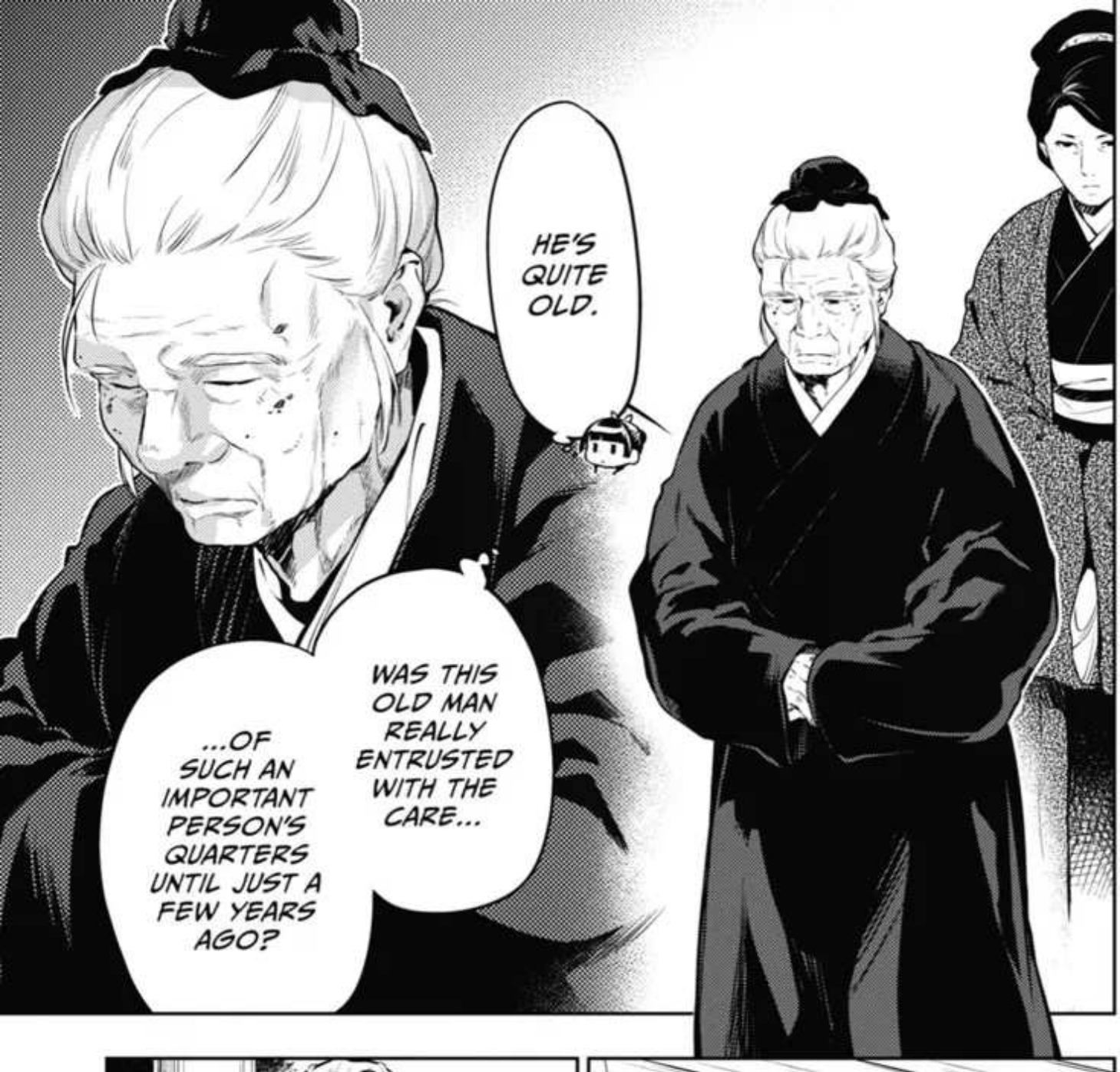

THE BRISTLES ARE MUCH STIFFER THAN I IMAGINED.
SNIFF SNIFF
AND THEY HAVE THAT DISTINCTIVE SMELL.
THERE ARE PIECES OF SOMETHING RESEMBLING BOILED SWEETS ALL OVER THE FLOOR...
...AND SMEARS WHERE SOMEONE TRIED DESPERATELY TO CLEAN THEM UP.


AND THE MESSY TRAIL LEADS TO...
...THIS WALL.
SHP
BEND
?!
IT HAS SPRING, AS IF IT WERE COVERED IN THICK PAPER.
SOMETHING WAS PAINTED ON THE SURFACE TO STRENGTHEN IT.


THIS ROOM APPEARS SIMPLE...
...HAS YELLOWED WITH AGE.
...MOST LIKELY BECAUSE ITS ALREADY PLAIN, UNORNAMENTED WALLPAPER...
I HAVE A ROUGH IDEA OF WHAT THE "CURSE" IS NOW...
...BUT I THINK I MIGHT BE ABLE TO PUZZLE OUT ONE MORE RANDOM THING FROM ALL THIS...


I'VE BROUGHT HIM.

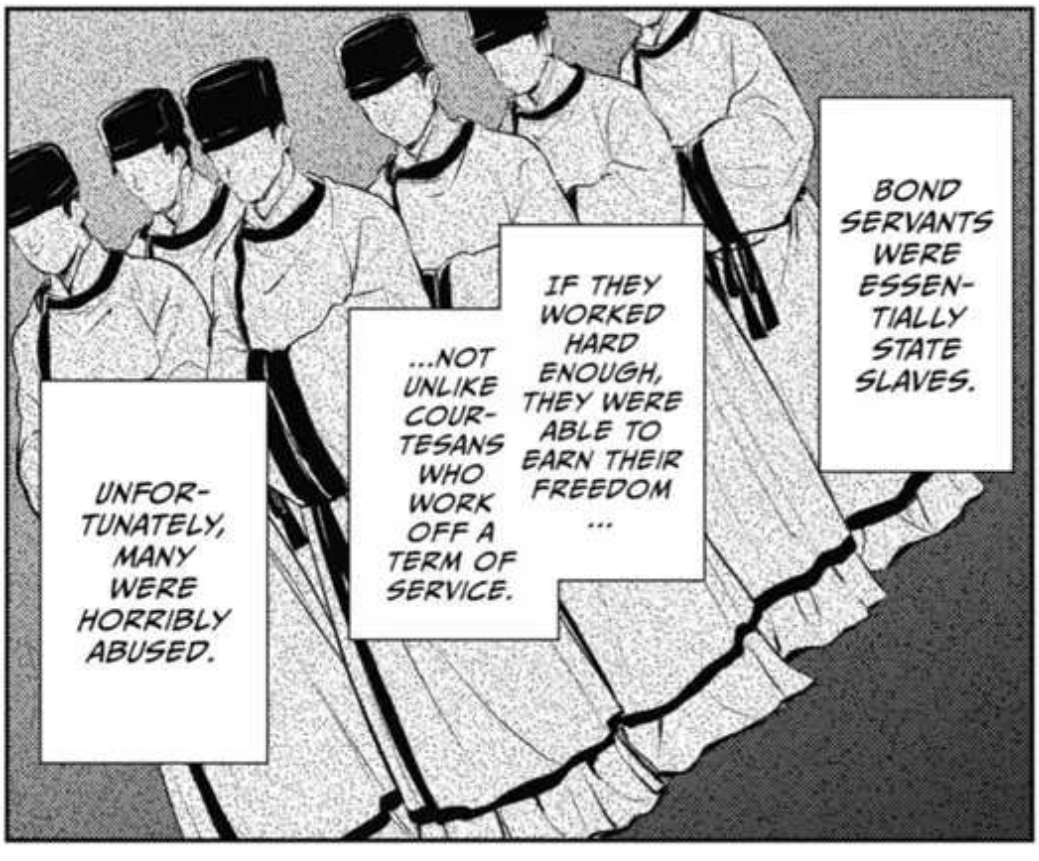

YOU...


HE'S QUITE OLD.
WAS THIS OLD MAN REALLY ENTRUSTED WITH THE CARE...
...OF SUCH AN IMPORTANT PERSON'S QUARTERS UNTIL JUST A FEW YEARS AGO?

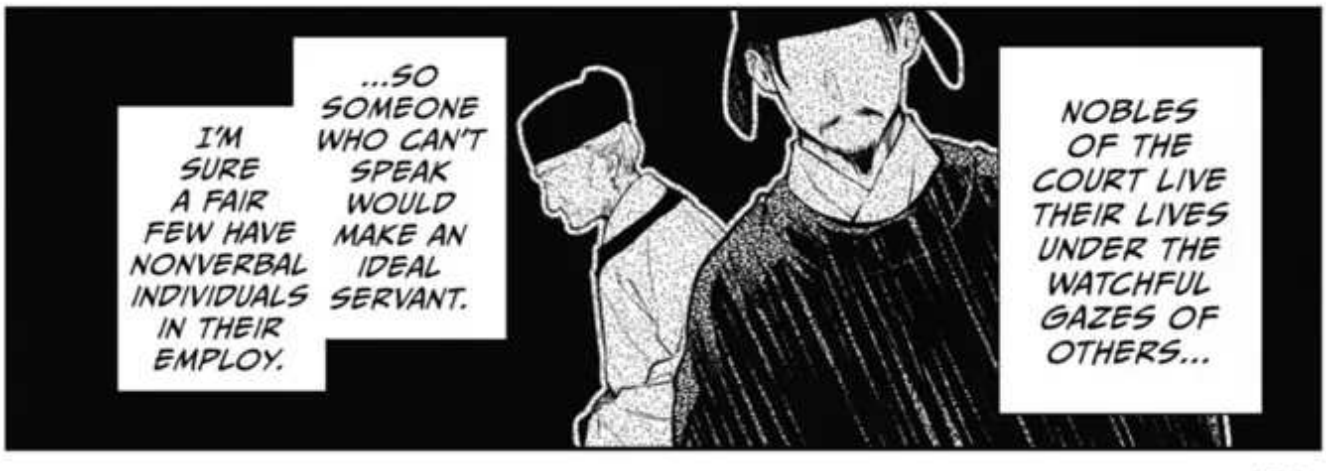



I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME-THING.

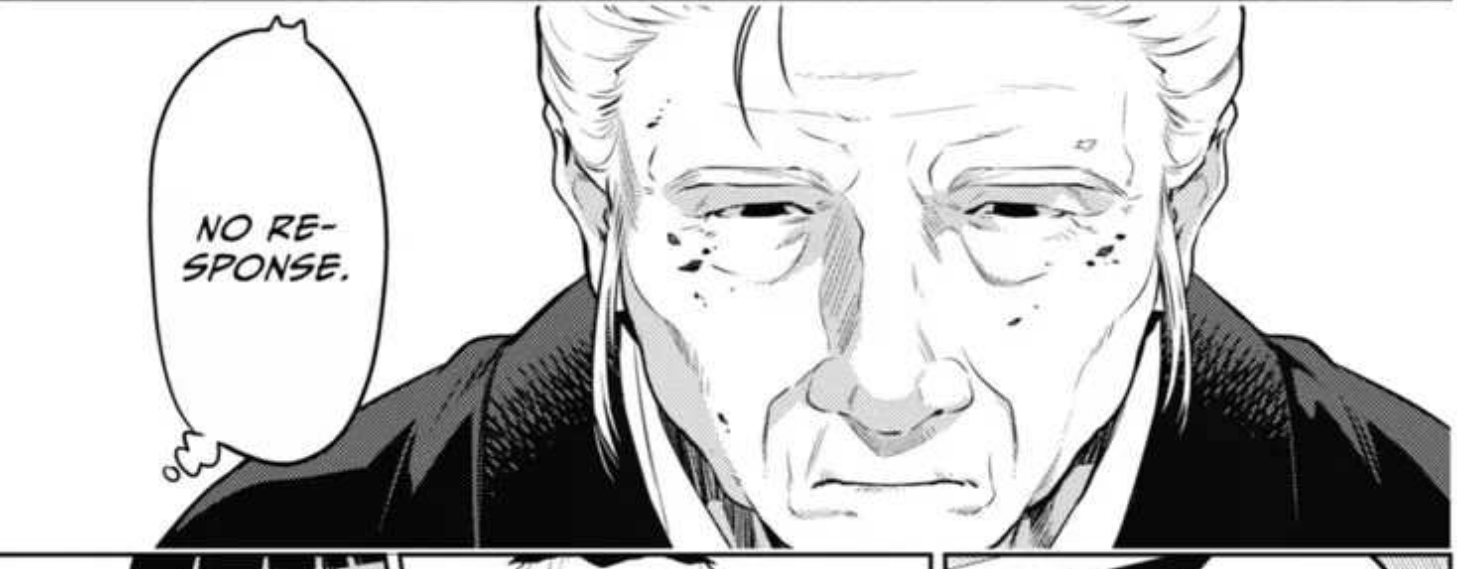

THIS MAN WAS ONCE A GOVERN-MENT-OWNED BOND SERVANT.
HE CANNOT SPEAK.


BOND SERVANTS WERE ESSEN-TIALLY STATE SLAVES.
IF THEY WORKED HARD ENOUGH, THEY WERE ABLE TO EARN THEIR FREEDOM ...
...NOT UNLIKE COUR-TESANS WHO WORK OFF A TERM OF SERVICE.
UNFOR-TUNATELY, MANY WERE HORRIBLY ABUSED.


I SEE.
SO THAT'S HOW IT IS.


NOBLES OF THE COURT LIVE THEIR LIVES UNDER THE WATCHFUL GAZES OF OTHERS...
...SO SOMEONE WHO CAN'T SPEAK WOULD MAKE AN IDEAL SERVANT.
I'M SURE A FAIR FEW HAVE NONVERBAL INDIVIDUALS IN THEIR EMPLOY.


WHEN YOU CLEANED THIS ROOM, DID YOU HAPPEN TO COME ACROSS ANY PAINTINGS?


NO RE-SPONSE.


...NO, THAT'S NOT IT.
DOES HE NOT WANT TO TALK TO A YOUNG GIRL LIKE ME?

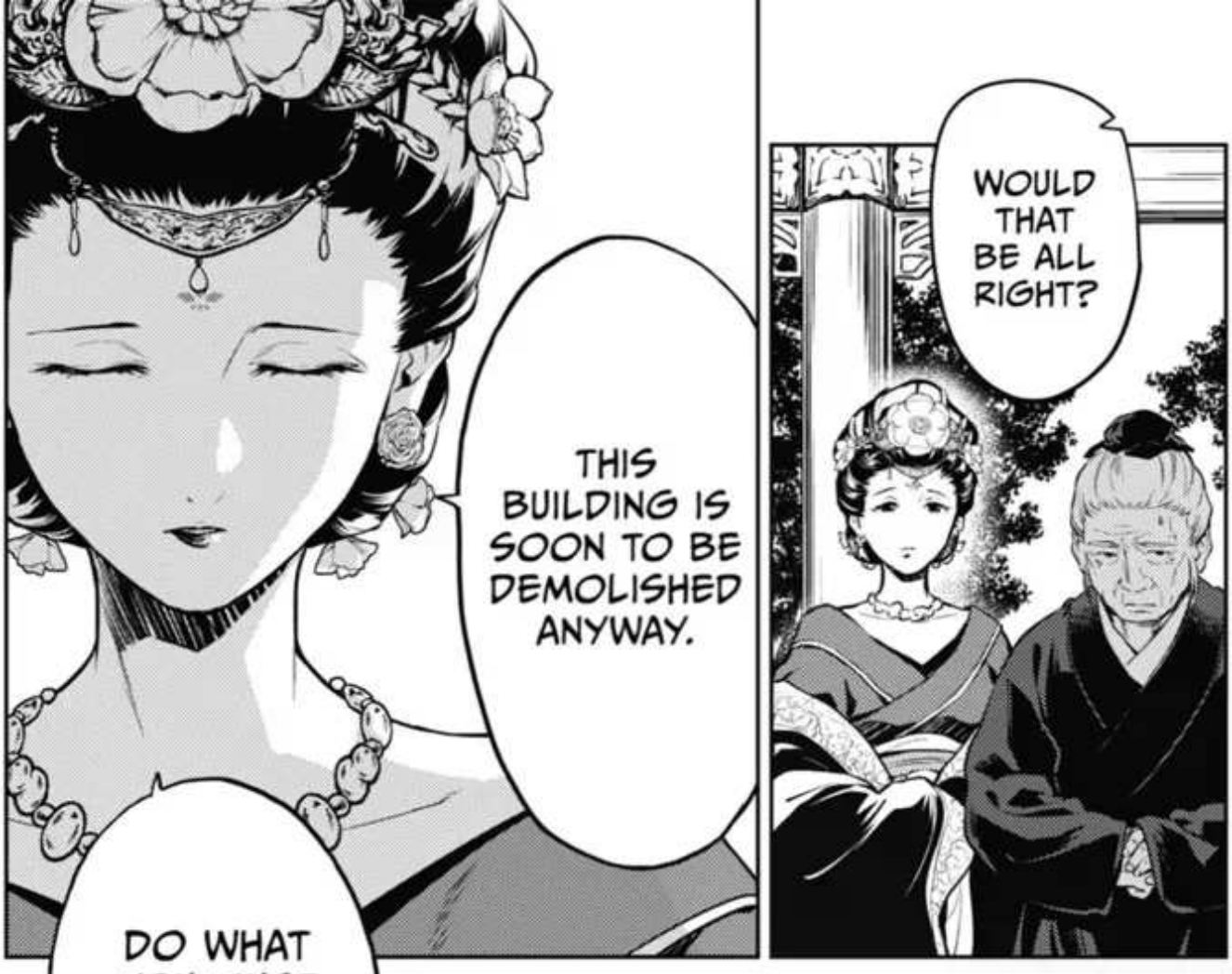

I THINK SOMETHING HAPPENED HERE.


GLANCE
HE'S HIDING SOME-THING.
IS THERE SOME-THING IN THE WALL?


MAY I PEEL OFF THIS WALL-PAPER?
!!
TOUCH
TOUCH




THOSE EYES ARE PLEADING WITH ME TO STOP...
...BUT I CAN'T LEAVE THIS ALONE.


THIS BUILDING IS SOON TO BE DEMOLISHED ANYWAY.
WOULD THAT BE ALL RIGHT?
DO WHAT YOU MUST IF YOU THINK IT WILL HELP US DISCOVER THE TRUTH.


SKRRK


PLAP
PLAP


RIP
RIP
RIP
RIP
NO WONDER IT WAS SO PLIANT.


WHAT IN THE WORLD ...?




IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MATERIALS OR THE TECHNIQUE.
IT'S AS IF THE PAINTING IS APPEALING TO THE VIEWER AND TRYING TO CONVEY SOME HIDDEN MESSAGE.
THIS WORK HAS THE POWER TO MAKE ME FEEL THAT WAY.

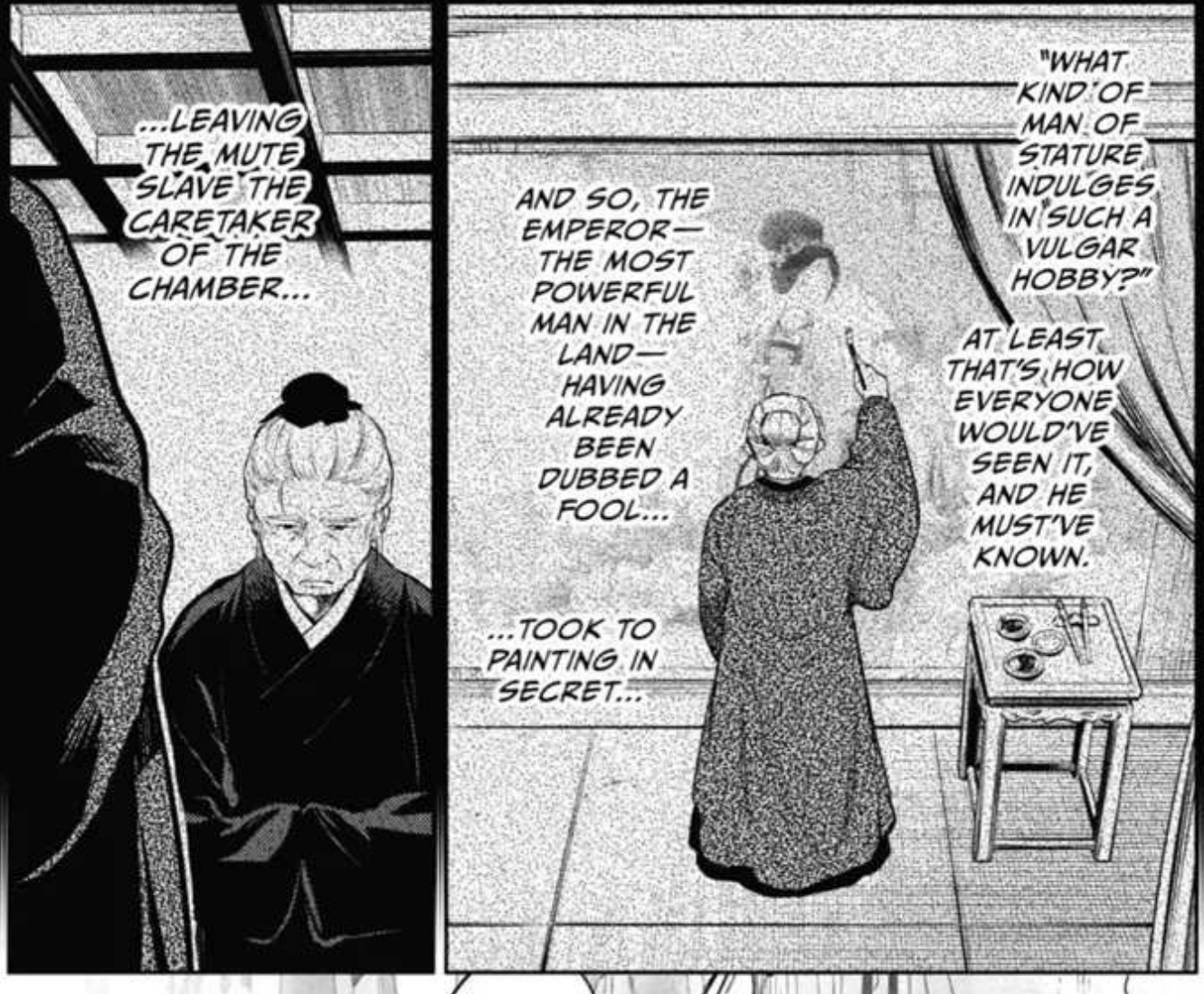

I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE LATE EMPEROR'S NATURE.
BUT I THINK HE LIVED AND DIED UNABLE MAKE USE OF HIS TRUE GIFTS...
...JUST TO STAND ATOP THE NATION.


IT REMINDS ME OF THE PAINTING I SAW LAST NIGHT.
THOUGH IT HAS DEGRADED FROM BEING COVERED UP WITH WALL-PAPER...
...THIS PAINTING MUST HAVE ORIGINALLY BEEN A FAR MORE VIBRANT YELLOW.
THAT'S THE STONE I FOUND IN JINSHI'S WICKER TRUNK.
THE PAINT HE USED ...
...COMBINED A PIGMENT WITH A LIQUID.
THIS PARTICULAR PIGMENT IS CALLED ORPIMENT YELLOW.
AS THE NAME WOULD SUGGEST, IT IS MADE BY CRUSHING ORPIMENT STONES.


ORPIMENT IS A MINERAL THAT CONTAINS ARSENIC, AND IT'S JUST AS TOXIC.
AND ARSENIC IS KNOWN TO SLOW DECAY.


BUT THE FACT THAT A YOUNG JINSHI PICKED UP AN ORPIMENT STONE AT THE INNER COURT...
AT FIRST, I THOUGHT THE LATE EMPEROR MIGHT'VE BEEN UN-WITTINGLY EXPOSED TO ORPIMENT...
...FROM WHERE IT'D BEEN USED TO DECORATE WALLPAPER OR SOME SUCH.
...ALONG WITH THE WARPED TEXTURE OF THE BRUSHES STREWN AROUND THIS ROOM...
...GAVE RISE TO ANOTHER POSSI-BILITY.
BY THE TIME OF HIS PASSING, IT HAD LIKELY CIRCULATED THROUGHOUT HIS BODY.
THE LATE EMPEROR MUST HAVE GRADUALLY ABSORBED THE ARSENIC...
...OVER THE LONG PERIODS OF TIME HE SPENT IN THIS ROOM.


I'M SURE HIS PHYSICIANS WERE AWARE OF THE POSSIBILITY AS WELL.
BUT THEY HAD NO IDEA HOW HE WAS COMING INTO CONTACT WITH IT...
...NOR WERE THEY IN A POSITION TO TELL THE EMPEROR WHAT HE COULD AND COULD NOT DO.
AT BEST, THEY COULD SIMPLY CONFIRM THAT IT WASN'T BEING MIXED INTO HIS FOOD.


...LEAVING THE MUTE SLAVE THE CARETAKER OF THE CHAMBER...
AND SO, THE EMPEROR— THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE LAND— HAVING ALREADY BEEN DUBBED A FOOL...
...TOOK TO PAINTING IN SECRET...
"WHAT KIND OF MAN OF STATURE INDULGES IN SUCH A VULGAR HOBBY?"
AT LEAST, THAT'S HOW EVERYONE WOULD'VE SEEN IT, AND HE MUST'VE KNOWN.


THERE MUST BE MORE PAINTINGS BENEATH THIS ONE.
THE WALL STILL YIELDS TO THE TOUCH.
BEND


WHAT I REALLY WANT TO KNOW...
...IS HOW THE LATE EMPEROR ACQUIRED ALL HIS PAINTING IMPLE-MENTS.
THESE CANDY-LIKE FLECKS ALL OVER THE FLOOR...
...ARE PROBABLY RESIN OR GLUE MADE FROM BOILED-DOWN ANIMAL HIDES AND THE LIKE.
SUCH SUBSTANCES IMPROVE THE ADHESION OF PAINT TO PAPER.
WHILE PAINT BRUSHES CAN BE MANAGED WITH ANIMAL HAIR...
...RESIN AND PAPER LARGE ENOUGH TO BE USED FOR WALLPAPER...
...AS WELL AS MINERALS FOR MAKING PIGMENTS...
...AREN'T ALL TOO EASILY OBTAINABLE.
THAT MEANS ...
...SOMEONE WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY...
...TO SPECIALLY SUPPLY EVERYTHING HE WOULD NEED TO PAINT.


...THEY MUST HAVE SEEMED TO HIM A GREAT LOOMING SHADOW FROM WHICH HE COULD NOT ESCAPE.
AT THE SAME TIME...
THE LATE EMPEROR HAD NO INTEREST IN GROWN WOMEN.


THE WOMAN IN THIS PAINTING KNEW...
...THAT HER OWN CHILD WAS UNFIT TO BE EMPEROR.

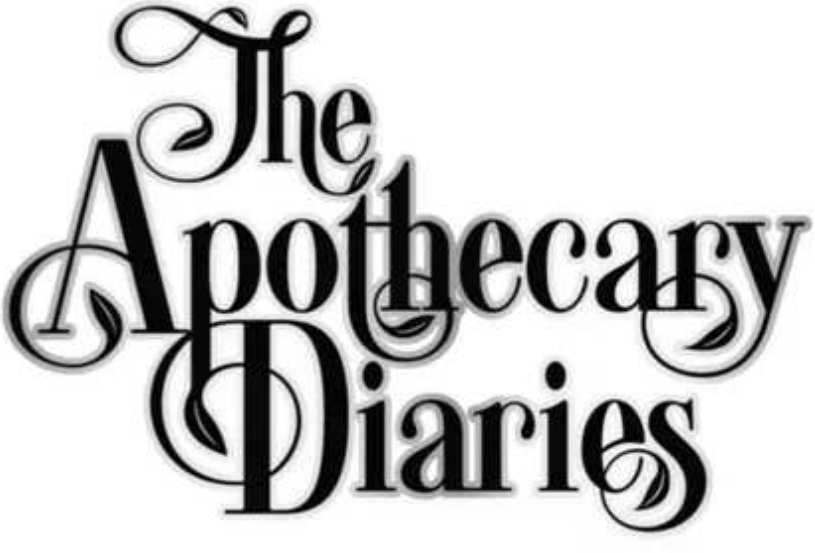

THAT'S WHY SHE GATHERED POWER TO HER HAND, BECOMING NIGH AN EMPRESS HERSELF...
HOW IRONIC, THEN...
...THAT THE LAST THING SUCH A FIERCE MOTHER BESTOWED UPON HER BELOVED SON...
...WAS THIS PLACE AND THE TOOLS WITH WHICH TO PAINT.
...AND DID ALL SHE COULD TO PROTECT HER CHILD ON THE THRONE THAT HE'D FALLEN INTO...
...BY SHEER CHANCE.


THIS OLD MAN MAY HAVE BEEN THE ONE TO RECEIVE THE MATERI-ALS...
...FROM THE THEN EMPRESS DOWAGER AND GIVE THEM TO THE LATE EMPEROR.
NEITHER WOULD'VE KNOWN ABOUT THE POISON LURKING WITHIN.
SHE SEEMS ALMOST TO BE POSING QUESTIONS TO SOMEONE UP THERE BEYOND THE VAST BLUE SKY...


PERHAPS LEARNING THE TRUTH HAS MADE HER SENTI-MENTAL...


AND THAT IS AS MUCH AS I CAN TELL YOU.




The Apothecary Diaries

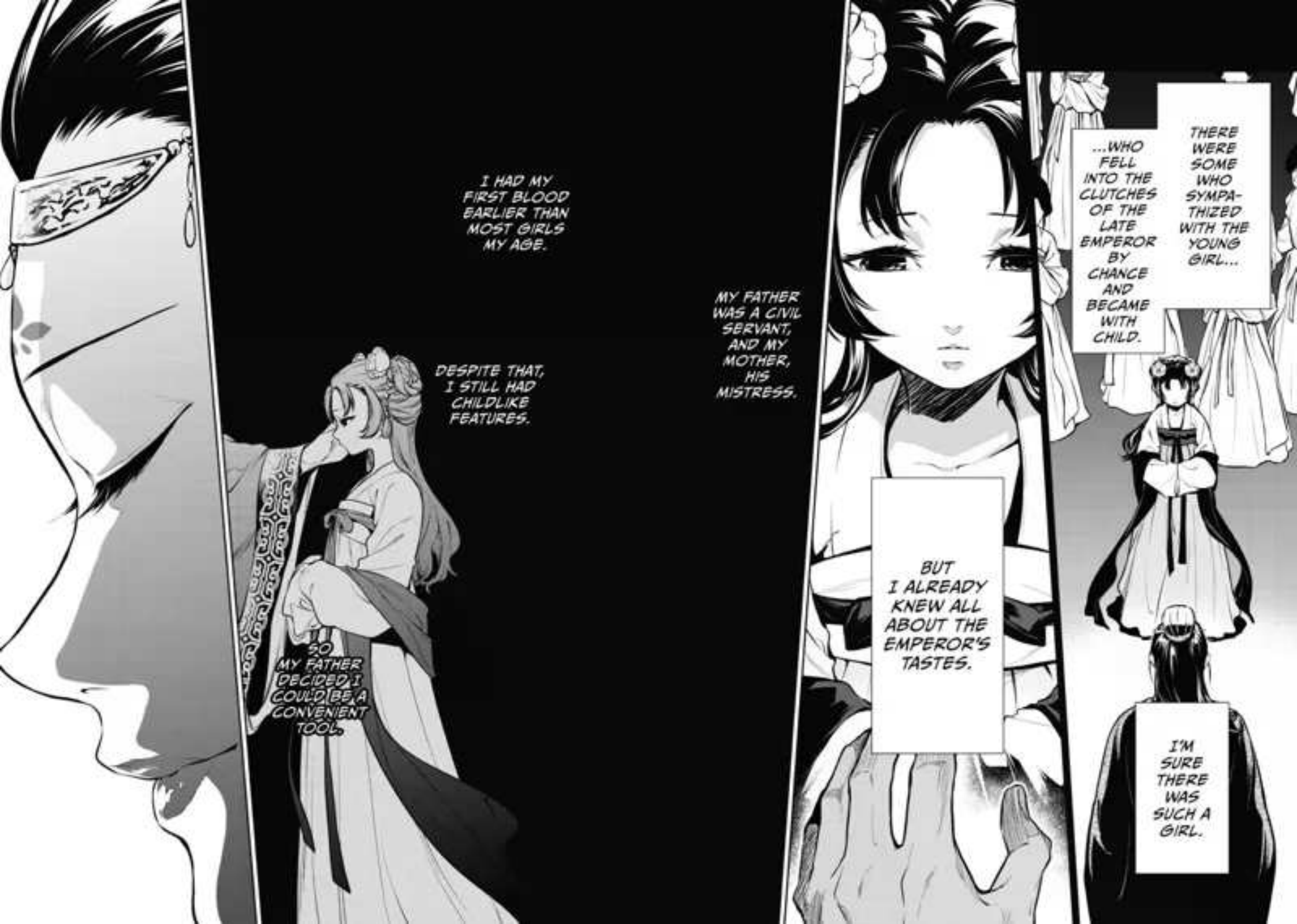

Chapter 58 The Late Emperor ③




THE PALACE GIRL NAMED MAOMAO HAS GIVEN ME THE ANSWERS I SOUGHT AND THEN SOME.
SHE MAY HAVE EVEN TOLD ME MORE THAN I STRICTLY NEEDED OR WANTED TO KNOW.


OHH ... ... HOW I SEETHE WITH RAGE RIGHT NOW.


...MAY BE ONE OF THE GIRLS IN THIS PAINTING.
THE PAINTING MAY HAVE FADED, BUT HER LARGER-THAN-LIFE PRESENCE REMAINS AS STRONG AS EVER.
OR PERHAPS I WASN'T EVEN IN-CLUDED.
...I...
IN THE END, I WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A PASSING INTEREST TO HIM.
...IS THE ONLY REASON I HAVE THIS LIFE AS THE EMPRESS DOWAGER.
THE SCAR I HAVE HERE NOW...


I HAD MY FIRST BLOOD EARLIER THAN MOST GIRLS MY AGE.
MY FATHER WAS A CIVIL SERVANT, AND MY MOTHER, HIS MISTRESS.
DESPITE THAT, I STILL HAD CHILDLIKE FEATURES.
SO MY FATHER DECIDED I COULD BE A CONVENIENT TOOL.
BUT I ALREADY KNEW ALL ABOUT THE EMPEROR'S TASTES.
THERE WERE SOME WHO SYMPA-THIZED WITH THE YOUNG GIRL...
...WHO FELL INTO THE CLUTCHES OF THE LATE EMPEROR BY CHANCE AND BECAME WITH CHILD.
I'M SURE THERE WAS SUCH A GIRL.


SHE WAS UNAWARE OF OUR FATHER'S INTENTIONS AND SIMPLY AWAITED WITH GREAT EAGERNESS THE VISIT OF THE EMPEROR SHE SO ADMIRED.
MY OLDER HALF-SISTER WAS INSTALLED AS A MID-RANKING CONSORT, AND I WAS SENT TO THE INNER COURT AS HER LADY-IN-WAITING.
BUT THE HANDSOME EMPEROR WAS CLEARLY UNINTERESTED IN THIS MEETING...
OUR MOMENT CAME SOONER THAN EXPECTED.
...AND HAD THE AIR OF A MAN WHO HAD BEEN COERCED INTO THE VISIT BY HIS EUNUCHS.
BUT MY HALF-SISTER WAS BROUGHT UP LIKE A PRINCESS...
WHEN SHE MOVED TO TOUCH HIM...
...SO SHE DIDN'T PICK UP ON IT.


...THE NEXT THING I KNEW, SHE WAS ON THE FLOOR.


IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THIS FEEBLE MAN WHO TREMBLED IN FEAR BEFORE A DAZED CONSORT OF MIDDLING RANK ON THE GROUND...
...WAS THE MOST POWERFUL PERSON IN ALL THE LAND.
AS A LADY-IN-WAITING, I SHOULD HAVE GONE TO MY MISTRESS'S SIDE TO COMFORT HER...
...OR APOLOGIZED TO HIS MAJESTY FOR HER DISCOURTESY.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?


BUT IN THAT MOMENT, I CAUGHT HIS MAJESTY'S EYE JUST AS SURELY AS HE CAUGHT MINE...
I, AN OVERLY AMBITIOUS GIRL OF TEN...


THEREAFTER, SEVERAL YOUNG GIRLS ENTRUSTED WITH A SIMILAR MISSION CAME TO THE INNER COURT.
AS THE NUMBER OF RESIDENTS GREW AND GREW...
...THREE NEW AREAS WERE BUILT TO HOUSE THEM.

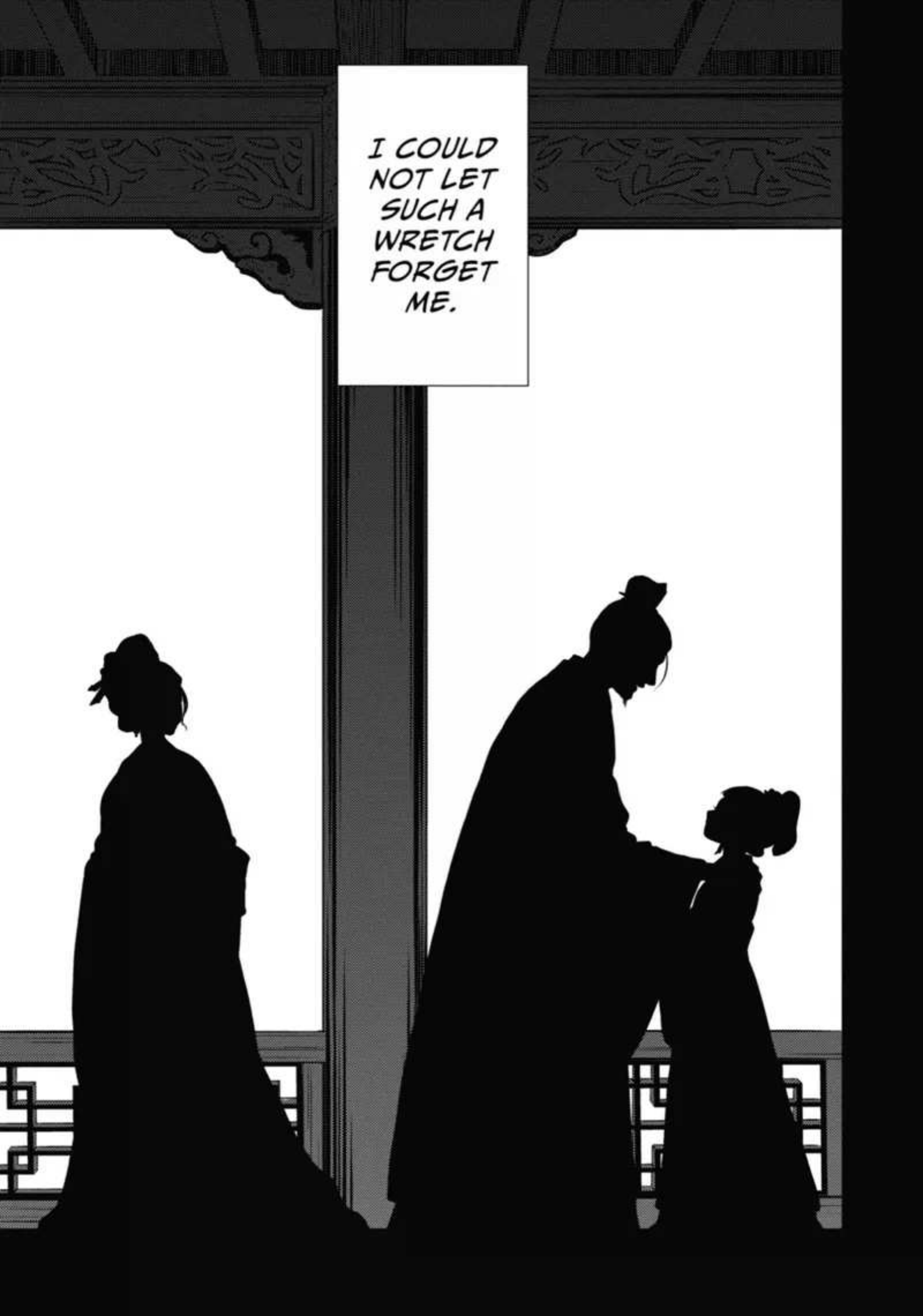

DURING THIS PERIOD, I REGULARLY FOUND MYSELF IN MORTAL DANGER.
I WAS LUCKY TO GIVE BIRTH TO A BOY...
...AND FOR THE EMPRESS TO ACCEPT HIM AS HER GRAND-SON.


THESE WERE CONSTRUCTED AROUND THE SAME TIME THE LATE EMPEROR ASCENDED THE THRONE. THEY ARE NOW PART OF WHAT WE CALL THE SOUTHERN GROUNDS.


THERE ONCE WAS A CONSORT WHO BORE A GIRL...
...BUT THE LATE EMPEROR WOULDN'T ACKNOWL-EDGE THE CHILD...
...AND BANISHED THE COURT PHYSICIAN WHO WAS THOUGHT TO BE THE CHILD'S FATHER.


PHYSICIANS AT THE INNER COURT WERE THE ONLY MEN EXEMPT FROM BEING CASTRATED AT THE TIME.
BUT THE INCIDENT WITH THE BANISHED PHYSICIAN CHANGED THAT.
THE MAN WHO UNDER-TOOK THE PROCE-DURE ON MY BELLY...
...WAS CASTRATED FOR THAT SOLE PURPOSE, AND THE THOUGHT OF THAT PAINS ME GREATLY.
TIME PASSED, AND NO LONGER DID I LOOK LIKE A YOUNG GIRL.
THE LATE EMPEROR STOPPED COMING TO VISIT ME.
HE EXISTED TO BE THE PUPPET OF THE EMPRESS, NOTHING MORE...
...THAT PATHETIC EXCUSE OF A MAN WHO COULD ONLY HOLD A CON-VERSATION WITH LITTLE GIRLS.




I COULD NOT LET SUCH A WRETCH FORGET ME.


THERE ARE SOME WHO SUSPECT THAT MY SECOND CHILD HAS A DIFFERENT FATHER...
...BUT THAT IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE.
IN MY BED...
...I SHOWED HIM THE GREAT SCAR ON MY BELLY...
ALL THOSE GIRLS HE'D LAID HIS HANDS ON...
...AND SPAT POISONOUS CURSES INTO HIS EAR OVER AND OVER, WHILE HE COWERED AND BEGGED FOR FORGIVENESS.
NO AMOUNT OF TORMENT COULD EVER COMPARE TO THE NUMBER OF SCARS HE'D LEFT ON THEM, BUT OH, HOW I MEANT TO TRY.



SOON AFTER, THE LATE EMPEROR BROKE DOWN AND RETREATED INTO THIS CHAMBER.

I HAVE NO WISH TO PURSUE THE QUESTION OF WHO WAS TO BLAME.


BUT ULTIMATELY, WHILE SHUT UP IN THIS ROOM, I DOUBT THAT MAN...
...HAD EYES FOR ANY-THING...
...BUT HIS MOTHER THE EMPRESS AND GUILELESS LITTLE GIRLS.


HOW DID THAT PAINTING LOOK AGAIN?


HE SAID IT WAS OUR SECRET AS HE CARESSED THE PAPER WITH HIS BRUSH...
...HIS DEMEANOR CALM AND PEACEFUL.


HE PAINTED ME JUST THE ONCE.


I DIDN'T NEED THE LATE EMPEROR ANYMORE...
I TREASURED THAT PAINTING AT FIRST...
...BUT I EVENTUALLY TOLD MY LADY-IN-WAITING TO THROW IT AWAY.
...JUST AS HE DIDN'T NEED ME.
EVEN IF HE'S THOUGHT TO BE THE PRODUCT OF ADULTERY...
...OR TAKEN FOR ANOTHER WOMAN'S BABE...
I WAS QUICK TO DECIDE...
...WHEN I BELIEVED MY CHILD MIGHT BE IN DANGER.
...HE'LL ALWAYS BE DEAR TO ME.




ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO...
...THAT MAN CAME TO SEE US, DIDN'T HE?
YES. THAT MUST HAVE BEEN OVER TEN YEARS AGO NOW.

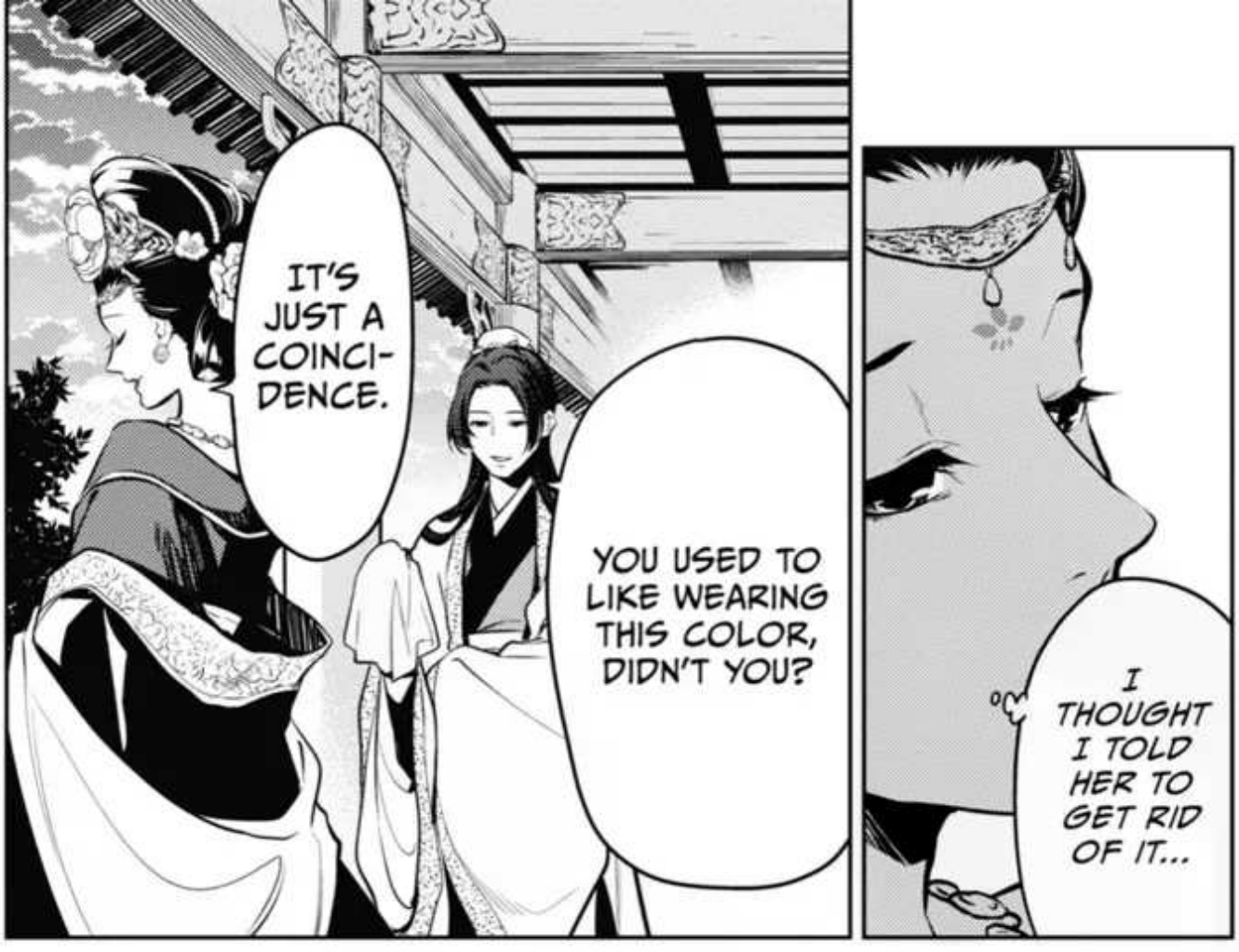

I REMEMBER PICKING UP SOMETHING LIKE THIS BACK THEN.


THE EMPRESS WAS IMMEDIATELY AT HIS ELBOW WHEN HE MADE HIS SUDDEN APPEARANCE...
...AND TOOK HIM BACK WITH HER, SOOTHING HER DARLING ONLY SON ALL THE WAY.

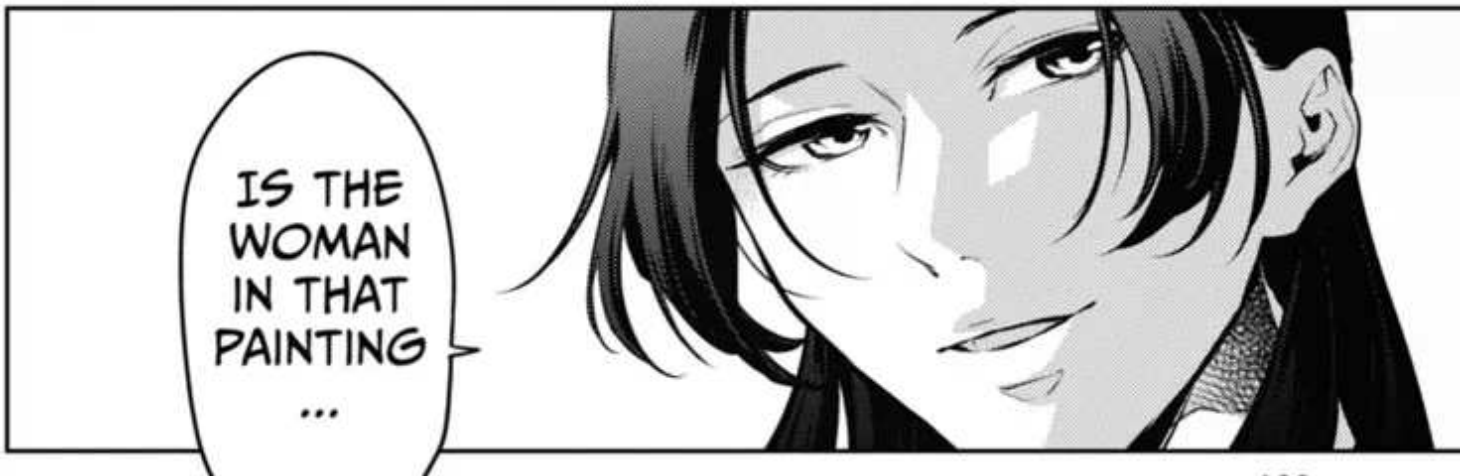

THIS IS APPARENTLY KNOWN AS "ORPIMENT."


SUIREN FINALLY GAVE IT BACK TO ME THIS MORNING.
...TO TAKE AWAY ANYTHING ...
...THAT HE SEEMED TO FIXATE ON PLAYING WITH.
A VERY LONG TIME AGO, I INSTRUCTED SUIREN...
...I AVOIDED MEETING HIS SEARCHING GAZES THAT SEEMED TO BE TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF MY MOOD.
NOT REALIZING HOW CRUEL IT WAS...


I THINK I'VE SEEN HIS WORK ONCE BEFORE.
BECAUSE OF THAT, HE MANAGED TO MATURE FASTER THAN MOST...
...WHILE REMAINING A CHILD AT HEART.
I'M SURE I PICKED UP THAT STONE...
...BECAUSE IT REMINDED ME OF THAT PAINTING.
...DONE IN SOFT COLORS.
THE PICTURE WAS OF A YOUNG GIRL...


IT'S JUST A COINCI-DENCE.
YOU USED TO LIKE WEARING THIS COLOR, DIDN'T YOU?
I THOUGHT I TOLD HER TO GET RID OF IT...


THAT'S THE ONLY REASON I WORE THE COLOR SO MUCH.
...HAP-PENED, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, TO BE YELLOW.
I COME FROM A PLACE THAT THRIVES ON THE TRADE OF TURMERIC, AND THE CLOTHING I BROUGHT FROM HOME...

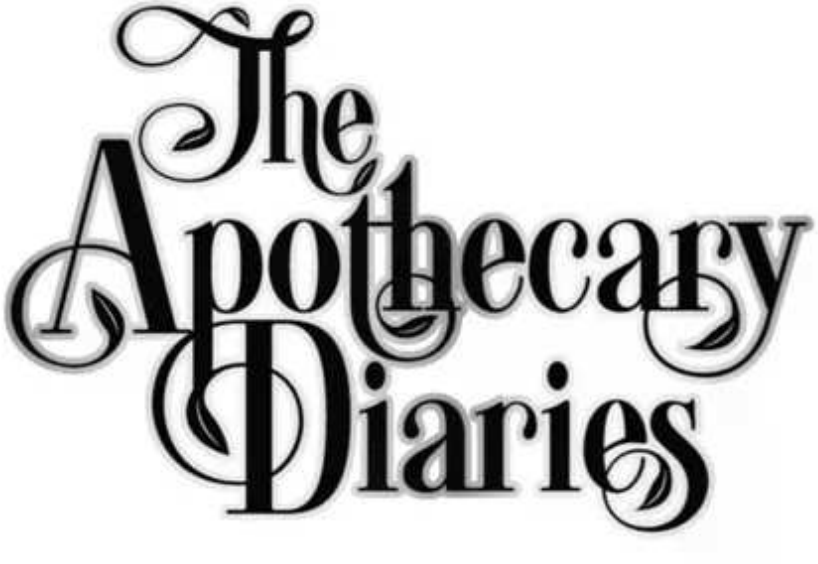

IS THE WOMAN IN THAT PAINTING ...


...TRULY THE LATE EMPRESS DOWAGER?
WHAT WAS HE TRYING TO TELL ME BACK THEN? I WONDER...


HMM.
WHO CAN SAY?
AND NOW WE'LL NEVER KNOW.
I HAVE NO IDEA.


I CHOSE NOT TO.
!!
YOU SEEM TO HAVE YOUR EYE ON A MOST INTERESTING YOUNG LADY.
ANYHOW, NEVER MIND THAT.
...HAPPENS TO BE VERY USEFUL.
...SHE JUST...


THAT SHE IS. HOW-EVER...
BUT THAT'S NOT ALL THERE IS TO IT. THAT MUCH I KNOW...
...YOU'D BE WISE TO HIDE AWAY YOUR FAVORITE...
...BECAUSE I'VE WATCHED YOU GROW UP OVER THE YEARS.
...BEFORE SOMEONE HIDES HER FROM YOU.


The Apothecary Diaries



Thanks for reading
The Apothecary Diaries, Volume 11!

When drawing the manga, I always try to imagine how the characters would move if they were animated. I wonder how it'll look when they're moving in an actual anime! I wonder if Nanao's composition and my drawings will be used? ✧✧ I'm really looking forward to seeing it! Everyone get hyped!!

From the artist,
Nekokurage


The Apothecary Diaries...
...is getting an ANIME!
...looking forward to it!
SUPER
PUPTEKII
...



Author: Natsu Hyuuga
Light novel illustrator: Touco Shino
Manga Artist: Nekokurage
The editor
You, the readers

Thank you always!

Itsuki Nanao,
the compiler

INNER COURT ETIQUETTE



Story by Itsuki Nanao *Art by* Nekokurage


IT IS AN HONOR TO SEE YOU THIS DAY, SIR JINSHI.
SHP
FLAW-LESS.
?!
WHY IS SHE SUDDENLY GROVELING ON THE GROUND?
STAAAARE...
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?
WHY DID HE STOP WALKING?
GRRRR...
HE CAN'T POSSIBLY EXPECT ME TO DO MORE THAN THIS.
SCOOT
...I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO HERE.
INCH
SCOOT
INCH

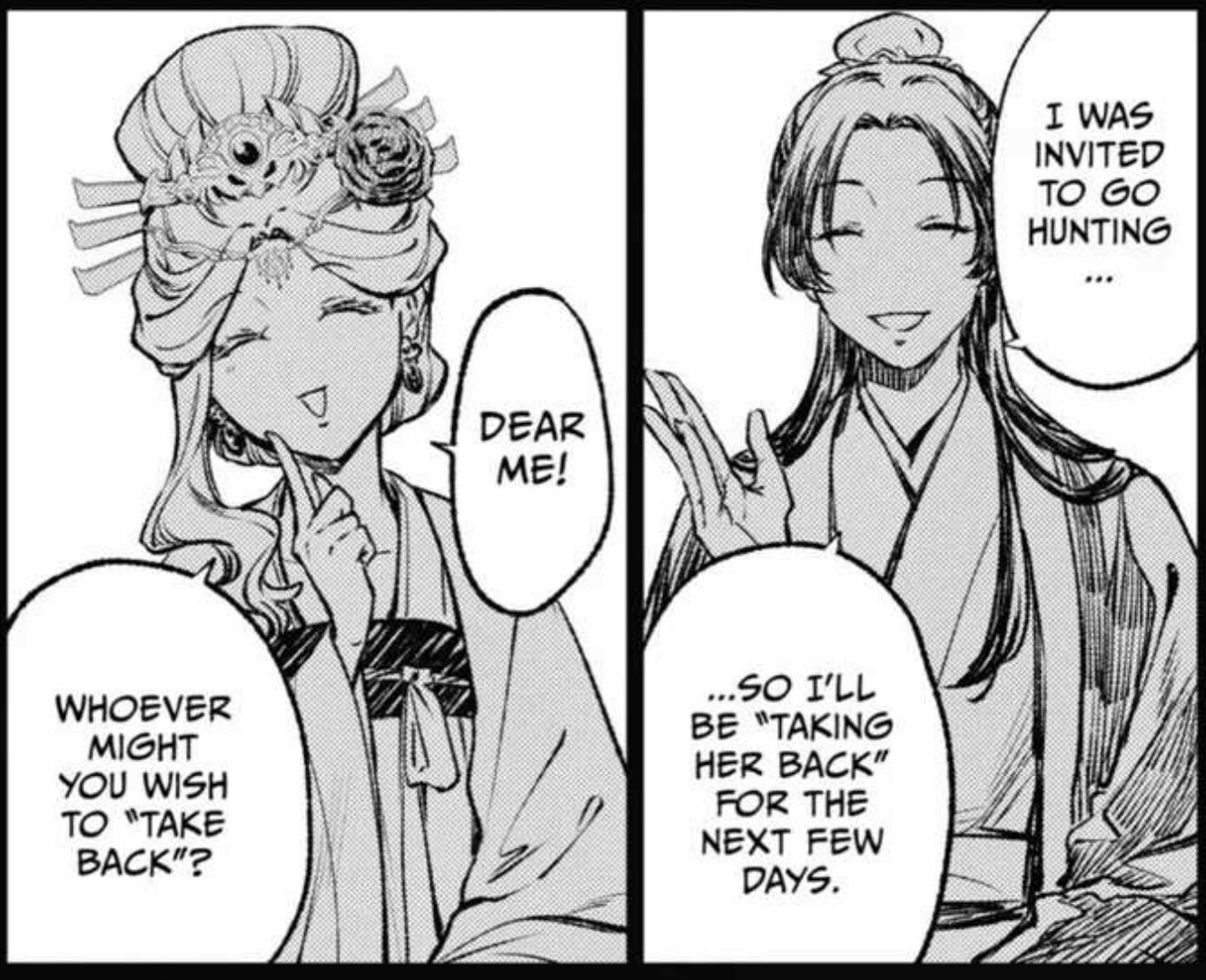




...AND LATER...



Next Volume Preview

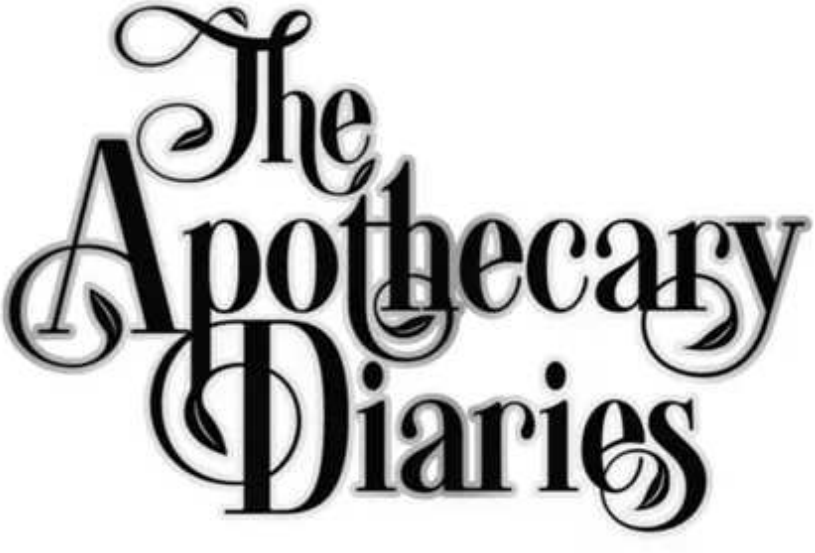




Continue reading for a sneak peek at Volume 12 of The Apothecary Diaries, coming soon!

...MAOMAO AND COMPANY HEAD NORTH ON A HUNTING TRIP...

The Apothecary Diaries

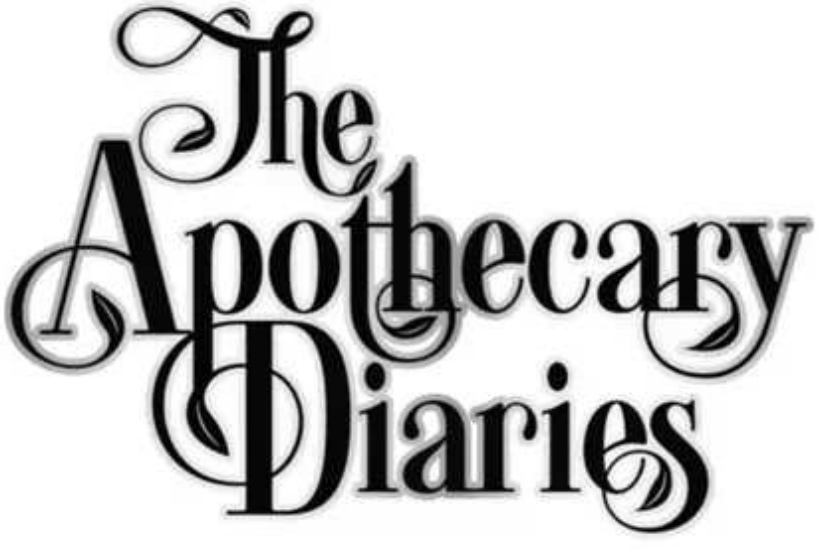

The Apothecary Diaries


THIS MUST BE THE SOURCE OF THE RUSHING WATER I HEARD BEFORE.
RUSSSH
WHAT A BREATH-TAKING SIGHT TO BEHOLD.
LET'S GET YOU COOLED OFF.
I'VE BROUGHT WATER FROM THE KITCHENS...
...SO YOU CAN DRINK THAT AFTER.


?!
THWAK
WHAT WAS THAT?
YANK


THWAK
THIS SEEMS TO BE A WHOLLY UNFORESEEN SITUATION, BUT HE'S KEEPING A COOL HEAD, TO MY SURPRISE.
A FIRE LANCE ...?
GRAB
SORRY IF THIS GIVES YOU A START!


LEAP
HUH ??
THWAK


The
Apothecary
Diaries

The Apothecary Diaries

Volume 11

Story by
Natsu Hyuuga

Art by
Nekokurage

Compiled by
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